

**VOICES AGAINST BONDAGE: THE TANZIMAT WRITERS' REFLECTIONS ON  
SLAVERY AND ABOLITIONISM (1830S-1870S)**

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## NOTE ON TRANSLATION

In this thesis, I use modern Turkish orthography for both Ottoman and modern Turkish passages to ensure consistency. Names are rendered in modern Turkish, such as İstanbul, devşirme. All translations of Turkish sources are my own unless otherwise noted.

## ABSTRACT

The Tanzimat period, catalyzed by the Gülhane Decree of 1839, ushered in a transformative era of modernization and reform in the Ottoman Empire, significantly impacting its literature. This thesis investigates how Tanzimat writers, including Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Namık Kemal, Samipaşazade Sezai, and Nabızade Nazım, engaged with the abolitionist discourse and Western perceptions of slavery. Through close analysis of their literary works, this research uncovers a dual strategy employed by these writers. Internally, they imbued themes of captivity and slavery with romantic and melancholic tones, implicitly critiquing the institution and advocating for humane treatment. Externally, particularly exemplified by Ahmet Midhat Efendi, they portrayed Ottoman society in a positive light to Western audiences. This study also identifies recurring patterns in their literary responses and examines their moral stances toward slavery. By integrating close reading and critical analysis of Tanzimat novels with the intellectual and legal history of the period, this research deepens our understanding of cultural exchange and ideological transformation during this pivotal era, demonstrating the intersection of reform discussions and creative expression.

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## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Tanzimat Literature was intrinsically linked to the sweeping reforms initiated by the *Gülhane* Decree in 1839. This decree signified a pivotal moment in Ottoman history, catalyzing widespread modernization efforts across various societal domains, including law, economy, military, and education. Notably, the literary landscape of this era underwent profound transformation, marking the integration of Western literary genres and thematic content that addressed pressing socio-political issues. Among these issues, the abolitionist movement gained prominence, advocating for the cessation of slavery within the Ottoman Empire. This thesis explores the responses of Tanzimat writers to the abolitionist discourse, analyzing how their literary works reflected the debates surrounding slavery and emancipation during this transformative period.

The Tanzimat period ushered in a reform era characterized by a fervent pursuit of modernization and reform within the Ottoman Empire. Initiated with the Tanzimat Edict proclaimed by Mustafa Reşit Pasha in *Gülhane* Park in 1839, this period began with the restructuring of traditional institutions and administrative procedures within the central and state administration.<sup>1</sup> Tanzimat reforms aimed to restructure and modernize various aspects of society, guided by the principles of equality, justice, and administrative efficiency. According to Zürcher, the primary objectives of the Tanzimat reforms were to safeguard the lives, honor, and property of the Sultan's subjects, establish a regular taxation system to replace the tax farming system, and introduce reforms such as equality before the law for all subjects regardless of religion.<sup>2</sup> This comprehensive agenda reflected the empire's aspirations for a more equitable and efficient governance structure, laying the groundwork for profound societal and cultural transformations.

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<sup>1</sup> İlber Ortaylı, *Türkiye Teşkilat ve İdare Tarihi* (Ankara: Cedit Neşriyat, 2008), 405.

<sup>2</sup> Eric J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 4th ed. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2017), 45.

At the heart of Tanzimat reforms lay the pervasive ideology of Westernization, considered essential for overcoming historical inertia and embracing contemporary progress. This Western influence not only guided reforms across sectors but also deeply shaped the mindset of administrators, intellectuals, and writers of the Tanzimat period. The impact extended beyond social and political realms, influencing culture, art, literature, and language. Intellectuals actively engaged with these changes, reflecting them in their writings, which addressed a broad spectrum of subjects – from national and religious issues to political and social matters.

In addition to the transformative impact of the Tanzimat era, Ottoman intellectuals were aware of the global abolitionist movement that gained momentum during the same period, challenging the institution of slavery within the empire. However, in Tanzimat literature, Western literary influences such as Romanticism and Realism shaped the portrayal of captivity and slavery, infusing these motifs with romantic and melancholic sentiments that highlighted personal and emotional experiences rather than addressing them solely as social issues. Authors such as Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Namık Kemal, Samipaşazade Sezai, and Nabızade Nazım, deeply affected by their environments and personal experiences, consistently wove themes of slavery and captivity into their works. By focusing on love, jealousy, and captivity, they critiqued the institution of slavery indirectly, evoking empathy from readers and advocating for humane treatment, rather than aligning explicitly with the abolitionist movement of their time.

During this period, Ottoman intellectuals responded to the abolitionist movement within the broader geopolitical context shaped by British influence. The relentless pressure from Britain compelled Ottoman thinkers to question the compatibility of slavery with principles of freedom and equality.<sup>3</sup> As the Ottoman Empire faced mounting scrutiny over its involvement in the slave trade, internal debates arose regarding the necessity for reform. These discussions, influenced by both internal reform agendas and external pressure, led to significant milestones such as the

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<sup>3</sup> Ehud R. Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s)" *Poetics today* (1993): 479.

closure of slave markets in 1846 and the prohibition of various forms of slavery in subsequent years. By 1880, an agreement with Britain reflected a convergence of domestic reforms and international pressure, reshaping the Ottoman stance on slavery. Historians like Ortaylı view the Tanzimat as a precursor to abolitionism, highlighting the era's role in shifting societal attitudes towards slavery.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, scholars like Toledano emphasize the interplay between internal reforms and external pressures, drawing attention to the complexity of Ottoman slavery history during this transformative period.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, these internal and external pressures, Toledano contends, forced Tanzimat writers to respond to abolitionist demands by adopting a dual strategy. Externally, they highlighted the more acceptable aspects of Ottoman society to present a positive image, while internally, they wrestled with critical views on practices like slavery, indicating a desire for reform.<sup>6</sup>

This thesis, based on Toledano's argument that Tanzimat writers responded to Western anti-slavery pressures by adopting a dual strategy, is dedicated to exploring the discourse surrounding abolitionism and the slavery debate among Ottoman intellectuals during the Tanzimat period. To further investigate this argument, the research will analyze novels by prominent figures such as Ahmet Midhat Efendi's *Esaret* and *Acayib-i Alem*, Namık Kemal's *İntibah*, Samipaşazade Sezai's *Sergüzeşt*, and Nabızade Nazım's *Zebra*. This analysis will address several key inquiries: How did these writers engage with the Western campaign against Ottoman slavery? How did writers respond to Western perceptions of slavery within Ottoman society during the Tanzimat period? Are there recurring patterns in how writers responded to Western perceptions of slavery? How did those writers depict slavery in their literary works? What moral stance did the writers take toward slavery? What literary strategies did Tanzimat writers employ to depict slavery in their works?

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<sup>4</sup> İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* (Ankara: Hil Yayın, 1983), 73.

<sup>5</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s)."

<sup>6</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s)."

The methodology employed in this research involves a thorough close reading and critical analysis of the selected novels, focusing primarily on examining the portrayal of themes of captivity and slavery. This literary analysis will consider the historical and cultural contexts in which these works were produced, as well as the strategies employed by the authors to address abolitionist and slavery debates. Integrating close reading and critical analysis of Tanzimat novels with the intellectual and legal history of the period, this study aims to shed light on the interactions between Ottoman intellectuals and the abolitionist movement and offer insights into their engagement with global discourses on slavery, including the legal changes and frameworks that shaped the status of slaves within Ottoman society.

During the Tanzimat period, Ottoman intellectuals reacted defensively to Western depictions of Ottoman slavery, strategically highlighting differences between Ottoman and Western slavery, particularly emphasizing domestic slavery as unique to the Ottoman context. This defensive response parallels Ottoman leaders' selective portrayal of slavery, such as *kul/barem* slavery, to counter Western pressure for abolition, aiming to preserve Ottoman cultural identity while reforming perceptions and policies on slavery internally. The intersection of intellectual discourse and global abolitionist movements during the Tanzimat era was pivotal in reshaping attitudes and policies towards slavery, reflecting broader socio-political and cultural shifts within the empire.

By examining the intellectual engagement of Tanzimat writers with abolitionism and Western perceptions of slavery, this research seeks to deepen our understanding of cultural exchange and ideological transformation during a pivotal period in Ottoman history. This thesis will analyze Tanzimat writers' defensive responses to abolitionism. The first chapter will delve into the historical context of Ottoman slavery during the Tanzimat era, exploring how internal and external factors influenced the institution, including the impact of Tanzimat's legal reforms and British efforts towards abolitionism. In the second chapter, the focus will shift to examining

the literary responses of Tanzimat writers, specifically analyzing works by Ahmet Mithat Efendi, Namık Kemal, Samipaşazade Sezai, and Nabızade Nazım. This comprehensive approach aims to provide insights into the societal and cultural dynamics of the Tanzimat period, highlighting how writers shaped and responded to the discourse on abolitionism within Ottoman society.

This research aims to enrich existing literature by examining how Tanzimat writers grappled with the abolition of slavery and Western perceptions of it, particularly through their defensive responses to these concepts. I argue that the legal reforms enacted during the Tanzimat period aimed to regulate and formalize slavery within the Ottoman Empire, in contrast to Britain's pursuit of complete abolition. Despite the awareness among Ottoman intellectuals of the global abolitionist movement gaining momentum during this era, they faced challenges in reconciling it with the entrenched institution of slavery within their own empire. Tanzimat writers, with the exception of Ahmet Midhat Efendi, did not overtly engage with abolitionist debates in their literary works. Instead, they responded to both internal and external pressures by adopting a dual strategy. Internally, they wrestled with critical views on practices like slavery, indicating a desire for reform. Externally, among the selected writers, only Ahmet Midhat Efendi chose to emphasize the more favorable facets of Ottoman society in order to portray a positive image to the Western world. These writers infused the portrayal of captivity and slavery with romantic and melancholic tones, moving beyond a mere portrayal of social issues. Influenced by their surroundings and personal encounters, these writers consistently interwove themes of slavery and captivity into their literary works. By focusing on concepts such as love, jealousy, and bondage, they implicitly criticized the institution of slavery. Their aim was to evoke empathy in readers and advocate for humane treatment, rather than explicitly aligning with the abolitionist movement of their time.

## Contextualizing Slavery in the Ottoman Empire

To understand the significance of the abolitionist discourse within Tanzimat Literature, it is essential to contextualize slavery within the Ottoman Empire. Slavery has a longstanding history in Ottoman society, described by diverse forms and practices that evolved over centuries. The Ottoman Empire's extensive territorial expansion and diverse population contributed to an institution of slavery, which included domestic servitude, military slavery (Janissaries), and the slave trade involving captives from various regions.

The institution of slavery, deeply rooted in Ottoman society, began during the reign of Sultan Murad I in 1362.<sup>7</sup> Prior to this, the non-Muslim populations residing in conquered territories maintained their freedom. The practice of taking slaves gained prominence during Sultan Murad I's reign, particularly with the conquest of Rumelia.<sup>8</sup> Slavery served various purposes within Ottoman society, including reconstruction efforts, artistic endeavors, agriculture, military service, and religious needs.<sup>9</sup> This pervasive presence of slavery within the Ottoman social structure emphasizes its profound impact on the empire's development and cultural dynamics over time.

During this era, slavery became a significant aspect of life within the Ottoman Empire, which also witnessed the establishment of the Janissary Corps to meet its military needs. The *Pençik Kanunu*, legislation enacted during this period, stipulated one-fifth of prisoners of war were conscripted into the Janissary Corps to serve as soldiers.<sup>10</sup> After the conscription of one-fifth of prisoners into the Janissary Corps, the remaining captives were distributed among veteran soldiers who had participated in battles, serving as spoils of war. This system bolstered the empire's military strength and contributed to the growth of its slave population.

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<sup>7</sup> Nihat Engin, *Osmanlı Devletinde Kölelik* (PhD diss., Marmara University, 1992), 49.

<sup>8</sup> Nihat Engin, *Osmanlı Devletinde Kölelik*, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Nihat Engin, *Osmanlı Devletinde Kölelik*, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Will Smiley, *The History and Theory of International Law: From Slaves to Prisoners Of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 34.

Various forms of slavery were prevalent within the Ottoman Empire alongside the military-administrative servitude known as the *kul*.<sup>11</sup> The kul system was sustained by periodic levies of unmarried, able-bodied male children from the sultan's Orthodox Christian subjects, primarily in the Balkans, a practice known as *devşirme*.<sup>12</sup> Through this system, the empire refined traditional Islamic approaches to slavery by integrating enslaved individuals into crucial military and administrative frameworks.<sup>13</sup> They ascended to positions of prominence, seamlessly integrating into ruling circles and becoming indispensable members of the elite. However, alongside the kul system, slavery persisted through warfare, trade, abduction, sales, and gifting. In the late period, methods of acquiring slaves expanded to include taking captives in war, kidnapping, tribute and tax payment, self-enslavement, sale of children, and birth in addition to the traditional practices.<sup>14</sup> As the empire evolved, slaves came not only from war captives but also from Asian and African countries further expanding the pool of enslaved individuals within the empire.<sup>15</sup>

Notably, slaves even attained the status of wives of sultans, residing within the harem and adapting to its unique lifestyle. However, slavery was not confined solely to the Ottoman ruling class or elite; its prevalence extended widely, reaching individuals of modest means who could afford to own them.<sup>16</sup> Despite the common association of slaves and concubines with affluent households and palaces, the reality of widespread slavery across various socio-economic strata within Ottoman society cannot be overlooked.

Personal slaves in the Ottoman Empire were often tasked with household duties, while male slaves primarily performed physical labor. Concubines (*cariyeler*) were commonly employed as maids within their master's household or were sold to upper-class women, thus becoming

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<sup>11</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s)," 479.

<sup>12</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s)," 479.

<sup>13</sup> Smiley, *The History and Theory of International Law*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800-1909* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), 44-54.

<sup>15</sup> Ehud Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 15-19.

<sup>16</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 12.

immersed in the cultural milieu of the empire. As Zilfi contends, slaves occupied diverse roles, encompassing a wide array of skills and tasks, ranging from intimate to remote, esteemed to demeaning. They served as guards, assistants, porters, field laborers, miners, masons, scribes, and musicians. However, their most prevalent and significant role was in domestic service, where they shouldered a multitude of responsibilities. From managing households as stewards and tending to garden to fulfilling roles as eunuchs, and wet nurses, and performing household chores like laundry, cleaning, cooking, and even serving as companions in bed, slaves played an indispensable role in the daily functioning of households.<sup>17</sup>

Slaves were evaluated based on their physical attributes and temperament, with beauty being valued for concubines, household skills for domestics, and strength for male laborers.<sup>18</sup> The classification of slave women into roles such as concubinage (*cariyes* or *odalisques*) or heavier labor (*balayık*) was primarily determined by market pricing rather than predetermined sexual destiny.<sup>19</sup> This allowed any female slave, regardless of her designated role or purchase price, to potentially become her master's sexual partner or be given as a gift for sexual use by others.<sup>20</sup>

The steady demand for female domestic slaves throughout the nineteenth century was driven by social norms favoring female domestic slavery in Muslim households over hiring free servants, who were not considered part of the household and could not appear unveiled before male family members.<sup>21</sup> Economically, slaves were often a more viable investment compared to free domestic servants, as the average purchase price of a slave justified itself after about six years of service, given the costs and interest rates of the time.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Madaline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 99.

<sup>18</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 198.

<sup>19</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 198.

<sup>20</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 198.

<sup>21</sup> Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade And Its Suppression: 1840-1890*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade And Its Suppression: 1840-1890*, 63.

The Tanzimat period, aimed at modernizing the Ottoman Empire, ushered in significant changes that impacted the institution of slavery, largely influenced by anti-slavery movements and internal reforms. In 1826, a notable transformation was the abolition of the Janissary corps during this era.<sup>23</sup> Despite the abolition of the Janissary corps, slaves continued to play roles in the military, albeit in altered capacities. During this era, sources and practices of slavery diversified. Methods such as taking prisoners of war, kidnapping, abandoning and selling children, and self-enslavement persisted in the late Ottoman Empire.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the *devşirme* system was in decline, reflecting broader shifts in Ottoman military recruitment. The slave trade experienced changes as well, with reduced importation from Africa and Caucasia due to international pressures.<sup>25</sup> These alterations in the sources and practices of slavery reflected the evolving landscape of the Ottoman Empire, transitioning away from traditional forms of slavery towards more modernized structures and practices.

As Toledano posits, by the end of the extensive Tanzimat period, there was a notable transformation in the trajectory of Ottoman slavery. The cessation of slave importation emerged as a recurring topic in negotiations between Great Britain and the Ottoman government. Although the legal institution of slaveholding persisted, legislation was enacted to prohibit the slave trade. Over time, slavery gave way to alternative forms of labor and patronage, such as the upbringing of free girls within households, their integration into various socio-economic roles based on individual abilities and necessities, and subsequently facilitating their marriage and establishment of independent lives (known as *çıraklık* and *besleme*). Notably, within the Ottoman elite, there was a growing disdain for slavery, with a gradual shift away from it driven by moral considerations.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 32.

<sup>24</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 44-54.

<sup>25</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of slavery (1830s-1880s)," 485.

<sup>26</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of slavery (1830s-1880s)," 484.

Despite these shifts, the utilization of slaves and concubines remained a symbol of status and affluence, reflecting the socio-economic dynamics of Ottoman society. Elites in the Ottoman Empire, comprising rulers, military commanders, and prosperous merchants, frequently demonstrated their wealth and status by owning and prominently displaying numerous slaves and concubines within their households, reinforcing their social standing and influence. For example, archival documents reveal that Fatma Aliye Topuz (1862-1936), one of the most prominent Ottoman women's rights advocates and the daughter of bureaucrat Ahmet Cevdet Pasha (1822-1895), was a slave owner.<sup>27</sup> In fact, her works indicate that she did not oppose slavery.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, religious leaders and affluent urban professionals also engaged in slave ownership, reflecting the widespread nature of the practice across different segments of society.<sup>29</sup> This practice served as a tangible representation of power and prestige among the elite class during this period of Ottoman history.

### **Historiography on Ottoman Slavery**

This study places significant emphasis on the literature review, which is divided into two parts: research on Ottoman abolitionism and the analysis of literary works from the Tanzimat period. Recent scholarship has seen a notable resurgence of interest in Ottoman abolitionist studies, marking a departure from earlier examinations of Ottoman slavery primarily within

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<sup>27</sup> Mübeccel Kızıltan, *Fatma Aliye Hanım Nisvan-ı İslam* (İstanbul: Mutlu Yayıncılık, 1993), 55-58 quoted Yaprak Zihnioglu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003), 53.

<sup>28</sup> For this please see Fatma Aliye Topuz, *Osmanlı'da Kadın / Cariyelik, Çokeşlilik, Moda*, by Orhan Sakin (İstanbul: Bizim Kitaplar, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 147.

economic,<sup>30</sup> social,<sup>31</sup> and gender studies.<sup>32</sup> Hakan Erdem highlighted the wealth of documents available for studying slavery and stressed the presence of numerous documents yet to be analyzed.<sup>33</sup> This has sparked a renewed interest and stimulated further research in this field. This expanding inquiry has moved beyond conventional subjects like the *Kapıkulu* (Sultan's servants) or the Harem (seraglio) to encompass diverse aspects of slavery in the Ottoman context.<sup>34</sup> Contemporary scholarship now predominantly explores the theoretical dimensions of slavery and the slave trade within the empire, with pioneers in abolitionist studies including Ehud Toledano, Hakan Erdem, and Michael Ferguson, who have shed light on the significance of abolitionist movements within the Ottoman world.

In his book, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, Ehud Toledano delves into the strategies employed by the Ottoman Empire to address abolitionist pressures from Europe, especially during the 19th century.<sup>35</sup> Toledano's analysis focuses on the final century of the Ottoman Empire, characterized by heightened international scrutiny, notably from Britain, which prompted debates on the abolition of slavery within the empire. He argues that this period witnessed profound transformations in the institution of slavery, with the Tanzimat reforms serving as a pivotal moment. Toledano emphasizes that slavery became a significant diplomatic concern in Ottoman-British relations, indicating that the institution transitioned into various forms of patronage and dependency. This included practices such as raising freeborn young girls

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<sup>30</sup> For further exploration of the economic aspects of slavery, see: Alan Fisher, "Studies in Ottoman Slavery and the Slave Trade II: Manumission" *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 4 (1980): 49-56, Fisher, "The Sale of Slaves in the Ottoman Empire: Markets and State Taxes on Slave Sales. Some Preliminary Considerations" in *Prekarious Balance: Conflict, Trade, and Diplomacy on the Russian-Ottoman Frontier* (Istanbul:Gorgias Press, 2010), İnalçık, Halil. *Studies in Ottoman social and economic history*. Variorum reprints, 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Studies focusing on the social aspects of slavery encompass: Yvonne Seng, "Fugitives and factotums: slaves in early sixteenth-century Istanbul." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 39.2 (1996): 136-169, Hülya Çanbakal, and Alpay Filiztekin. "Slavery and Decline of Slave-Ownership in Ottoman Bursa 1460–1880." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 97 (2020): 57-80, Suraiya Faroqhi, "Ottoman Guilds in the Late Eighteenth Century: The Bursa Case" in *Making a Living in the Ottoman Lands 1480 to 1820* (1995): 93-112.

<sup>32</sup> For studies focusing on slavery from gendered perspectives, please refer to: Leslie P. Peirce, *The imperial harem: Women and sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>33</sup>Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, xviii.

<sup>34</sup> M. Fatih Çalışır, "A Survey of Scholarship on Ottoman Slavery," *Tarih Okulu Dergisi*, (2009): 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Washington DC: University of Washington Press, 2012).

within households, socializing them into specific lower- or upper-class roles, and subsequently arranging their marriages to establish them in life (known as *çırak* or *besleme*).<sup>36</sup>

Investigating the dynamics of abolitionism and anti-slavery discourse in the late Ottoman Empire reveals a noticeable absence of substantial public engagement or organized movements opposing the institution of slavery.<sup>37</sup> This absence of widespread opposition can be attributed, as highlighted by Toledano in *Abolition and Anti-slavery in the Ottoman Empire: A Case to Answer?*, to external pressures driving governmental actions, particularly influenced by Britain, rather than internal advocacy.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the prevailing social and political context described by hierarchical structures and state-centric governance within the Ottoman Empire limited the emergence of vocal discourse challenging the practice of slavery. In his article “Late Concepts of Ottoman Slavery (1830s-1880s),” Toledano delves into the dynamics of Ottoman elite responses to both internal and external Western abolitionist pressures during the Tanzimat period.<sup>39</sup> He carefully examines how Ottoman statesmen, Young Ottoman activists, and Tanzimat writers grappled with the challenge of Western critiques of Ottoman slavery. Through his analysis, Toledano illuminates the bifurcated strategy employed by these groups, which involved projecting an image of kul/harem slavery to external audiences while treating domestic and agricultural slavery differently within the empire. By elucidating the ideological foundations shaping Ottoman attitudes towards slavery, Toledano sheds light on the multifaceted factors influencing elite perceptions of this institution. Furthermore, his exploration of the process of cultural conversion from Western to Ottoman perspectives on slavery provides important insights into the resistance during this transformative period in Ottoman history.

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<sup>36</sup> Toledano, *Slavery and abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Ehud R. Toledano, “Abolition and Anti-slavery in the Ottoman Empire: A Case to Answer?” *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 119.

<sup>38</sup> Toledano, “Abolition and Anti-slavery in the Ottoman Empire: A Case to Answer?” 117-136.

<sup>39</sup> Ehud R. Toledano, “Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s)” *Poetics today* (1993).

In *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise 1800-1909*, Hakan Erdem provides a comprehensive analysis of Ottoman slavery from its classical period to abolition. Drawing on a diverse range of primary sources, including official documents and diplomatic records, Erdem examines the relationship between internal dynamics and external pressures, particularly from European abolitionist movements. He offers unique insights by exploring English-Ottoman diplomacy through the lens of abolitionism and placing the discourse on slavery within the intellectual milieu following the Tanzimat period. Erdem highlights that Ottoman slavery persisted primarily through traditional norms rather than formal legal enforcement, with some customs promoting manumission after service and tacitly permitting escape for mistreated individuals. His work also discusses how escaped slaves seeking refuge with foreign consulates contributed to diplomatic interventions that facilitated emancipation, illustrating a shift towards enslaved individuals shaping their own destinies upon gaining freedom.<sup>40</sup>

In *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Zilfi presents a compelling argument that challenges prevailing perceptions of Ottoman enslavement. Through an attentive analysis of archival sources and an exploration of gender dynamics, Zilfi contextualizes slavery as a fundamental aspect of Ottoman society, integral to its social, cultural, and political fabric. She deconstructs the myth of Ottoman slavery's supposed benevolence, emphasizing the harsh realities faced by enslaved individuals, particularly women. By centering their experiences, Zilfi highlights the agency and resilience of enslaved women within a system designed to oppress and exploit. Zilfi's work stands as a significant contribution to scholarship on Ottoman slavery.<sup>41</sup>

Michael Ferguson's piece *Abolitionism and the African Slave Trade in the Ottoman Empire (1857–1922)* contributes to the understanding of the abolitionist movement in the empire, highlighting the multifaceted attitudes of Ottoman authorities towards slavery and abolition. Despite external pressures that prompted discussions on halting the slave trade, Ottoman

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<sup>40</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*.

<sup>41</sup> Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*.

officials often exhibited mixed feelings towards abolition, leading to ineffective agreements with foreign nations. Ferguson underscores that despite concerted international endeavors, the legality of slavery persisted until the empire's dissolution in 1922, emphasizing the enduring impact of religious support for slavery and the entrenched maintenance of existing norms within Ottoman society.<sup>42</sup>

Another significant aspect of the literature that merits attention in this study is the scholarly examination of Tanzimat period novels and writers. A seminal work in the exploration of slavery within Tanzimat literature is İsmail Parlatır's *Tanzimat Edebiyatında Kölelik* (Slavery in Tanzimat Literature).<sup>43</sup> Through this comprehensive study, Parlatır carefully analyzes numerous literary works from the Tanzimat period, examining their treatment of slavery across various dimensions such as subject matter, thematic elements, and character portrayals. One key contention of Parlatır's is the frequent depiction and discussion of the slave trade within novels and stories, which he posits as a significant outcome of the Tanzimat era. Moreover, Parlatır delves into the motivations behind Tanzimat writers' engagement with slavery, attributing it to the perceived differences between Eastern and Western societies and their respective institutions of slavery. He notes a prevalent portrayal of concubines in a favorable light, suggesting that being a concubine was often depicted as desirable, potentially leading to elevated social status.<sup>44</sup> Parlatır's analysis sheds light on the interaction between literature, societal norms, and historical contexts during the Tanzimat period.

Another important work in this field is Murat Karabulut's article *Tanzimat Dönemi Romanlarında Hürriyet ve Esaret İzlekleri* (Themes of Freedom and Slavery in Tanzimat Period

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Ferguson, "Abolitionism and the African Slave Trade in the Ottoman Empire (1857–1922)" in *The Palgrave Handbook of Bondage and Human Rights in Africa and Asia* (2019): 209-226.

<sup>43</sup> İsmail Parlatır, *Tanzimat Edebiyatında Kölelik* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1992)

<sup>44</sup> Parlatır, *Tanzimat Edebiyatında Kölelik*, 127.

Novels).<sup>45</sup> Karabulut explores the themes of freedom and captivity in novels from the Tanzimat period, offering a comparative analysis of these concepts. He argues that the themes of freedom and captivity are intertwined in these works. Furthermore, Karabulut highlights the differing perceptions of freedom and captivity between the Ottoman Empire and the West. He contends that the circumstances of slaves and concubines in Europe differed from those in the Ottoman Empire.

This scholarship addresses a notable gap by focusing on the specific responses of Tanzimat writers to abolitionist discourse and Western perceptions of slavery within the context of Ottoman literature. While existing scholarship acknowledges the broader impact of the Tanzimat period on Ottoman society and culture, including its literature, there is a need for more in-depth exploration of how writers engaged with the abolitionism and slavery in their literary works. By delving into the works of Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Namık Kemal, Samipaşazade Sezai and Nabızade Nazım, this research provides a critical analysis of their literary responses to abolitionism. Through close reading, the study uncovers the internal and external strategies employed by these writers, offering insights into their portrayal of captivity and slavery. The thesis seeks to deepen our comprehension of this critical historical period and its intellectual discourse, showing the complexities of ideological debates and the impact of external influences on Ottoman thought.

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<sup>45</sup> Mustafa Karabulut, "Tanzimat Dönemi Romanlarında Hürriyet ve Esaret İzlekleri" *Türk Dili* 724 (2012): 321-334.

## CHAPTER 1: OTTOMAN SLAVERY IN THE TANZIMAT ERA

This chapter investigates the phenomenon of domestic slavery during the Tanzimat period, tracing the trajectory of legal and diplomatic changes that shaped the status of slaves within the Ottoman Empire. First, I will discuss the legal transformations of this era, examining how slaves were situated within the evolving legal framework alongside the emerging concept of equality. Key documents such as the Tanzimat Edict (1839), *Cezâ Kanunnamesi* (penal code) of 1840, *Kanun-i Cedid* (1851), and *Mecelle* (1868) will be analyzed to uncover these shifts. In the second part of the study, I will explore Ottoman diplomacy with Britain, highlighting Britain's approach to the Ottoman slave trade and how these international agreements impacted slaves. I argue that, despite legal reforms and diplomatic pressures, slaves were largely excluded from significant legal changes and the emerging notions of equality. Instead, slaves were treated merely as accomplices in certain legal contexts, with rights such as manumission and inheritance granted in limited circumstances. Moreover, Britain's efforts were focused more on abolishing the slave trade than on addressing the institution of slavery itself. Therefore, I argue that the changes made by the Ottoman Empire were not sufficient to alter the status of slaves. In short, slavery during this period is characterized by ambiguity and exclusion.

### LEGAL REFORMS AND SLAVERY IN THE TANZIMAT ERA

#### 1. Factors Behind Legal Reforms in the Tanzimat Period

Upon examining the reasons behind the legal reforms during the Tanzimat Period, I identify two distinct groups. The first group, known as domestic reasons, encompasses the changes unfolding in the social fabric of the Ottoman State, necessitating new legal regulations. The second group, termed external reasons, comprises shifts in the commercial landscape of Western states and their imposition of distinct legal rules.

The Tanzimat reforms represent a pivotal era in Ottoman history, reflecting a comprehensive endeavor to modernize and restructure governance and society. This transformative period began on November 3, 1839, with Reşid Pasha's proclamation of the *Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayun*. The objective of Tanzimat was to enhance state governance, regulate societal and economic relations, and address the decline of the Ottoman Empire. These reforms emerged as a necessary response to the evolving challenges and developments within the empire during the 19th century, both domestically and internationally.

Various interpretations exist regarding the motivations behind the proclamation of the Tanzimat Edict, yet there is consensus among many scholars that the primary impetus was to extricate the state from its challenging circumstances. According to Engelhardt, Tanzimat aimed to foster closer relations between Muslims and Christians socially, while politically, it sought to appease European powers and elicit more favorable treatment for the Ottoman Empire.<sup>46</sup> In essence, Tanzimat sought to rejuvenate deteriorating aspects of the state with new principles to ensure its survival and foster unity and solidarity among diverse population segments.

However, despite notable changes and the groundwork laid for modernization during the Tanzimat period, significant obstacles and limitations emerged. The empire's persistent territorial losses and internal conflicts, alongside enduring social and cultural tensions, indicate that the reforms fell short of achieving comprehensive modernization and unity.<sup>47</sup> The grassroots were caught off guard by these top-down innovations, sparking vigorous responses rooted in the political and cultural upheaval fueled by the reforms. Berkes proposes that the fundamental problem lay in the unintentional ceding of Ottoman sovereign rights to foreign powers. Specifically, the inability of Ottomanism ideology to gain traction, the rise of national uprisings, and the absence of economic autonomy resulted in the Ottomans losing control over their

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<sup>46</sup> Engelhardt, *Tanzimat ve Türkiye*, Tr. Ali Reşad (İstanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 1999), 13-14.

<sup>47</sup> Carter Vaughn Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, And Modernity: A History, 1789-2007* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), 132.

territories.<sup>48</sup> Thus, despite its intentions, the Tanzimat reforms faced challenges that hindered their effectiveness in achieving their overarching goals for domestic and external reasons.

### 1.1. Domestic Reasons

During the early 19th century, the Ottoman Empire faced significant internal challenges, including administrative inefficiencies and widespread corruption. Administrative inefficiency, compounded by systemic corruption and decentralization, resulted in a fragmentation of power. Provincial governors and local elites wielded significant authority, often to the detriment of the peasantry, while the central government struggled to assert control. The erosion of legal integrity and the prevalence of unjust practices fostered discontent and unrest, necessitating comprehensive reform to restore order and reestablish central authority.

Economically, the empire was burdened by unsustainable practices that imposed heavy strains on its subjects.<sup>49</sup> Militarily, the Ottoman Empire faced significant challenges, both internal and external. The once formidable Janissaries had degenerated into a corrupt and ineffective force, prompting Sultan Mahmud II to abolish them in 1826.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the empire's military prowess had been undermined by defeats in various conflicts and uprisings, both within its borders and beyond. Threats from internal factions, such as Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt, and external powers emphasized the urgent need for military and administrative reforms to safeguard the empire's sovereignty.

Into the Tanzimat period, profound societal changes necessitated significant legal reforms within the Ottoman Empire. Aydın emphasizes that the overwhelming demand on the Ottoman Empire's single-judge court system was the primary impetus behind the regulatory

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<sup>48</sup> Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Ottoman Secularism in Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2013), 247-248.

<sup>49</sup> Butrus Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," *Die Welt des Islams* 34.2 (1994): 176-177.

<sup>50</sup> Abu-Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," 178.

changes of the 19th century, as it became insufficient to handle the growing caseload.<sup>51</sup> To address these challenges, the Tanzimat Period witnessed the establishment of specialized commercial courts, mixed commercial courts, regular courts, and institutions like the *Divan-ı Ahkâm-ı Adliye* and the *Şuray-ı Devlet*.<sup>52</sup> These new court structures and legal institutions aimed to enhance the legal system's effectiveness and responsiveness in addressing the evolving societal and economic landscape.

Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, significant challenges emerged within the legal system. The failure of madrasas to adequately fulfill their educational roles resulted in a shortage of jurists proficient in Islamic law, compounded by the inclusion of individuals without formal madrasa education, including non-Muslims, as judges in newly established courts.<sup>53</sup> These developments highlighted the urgent need for effective legal reforms to address educational shortcomings and ensure the competence of judicial personnel. Furthermore, the proliferation of jurisprudential interpretations within the Hanafi school of thought, the official school of thought of the Ottoman Empire, posed challenges for judges in determining and applying the most authoritative interpretations of Islamic law.<sup>54</sup> The evolving circumstances accelerated the movement for legal reform, emphasizing the necessity of adapting the legal system. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of ensuring consistency and expertise in legal decision-making.

In conclusion, the legal transformations during the Tanzimat period were driven by societal shifts and highlighted the critical need for judicial modernization. The establishment of new court structures aimed to improve efficiency but faced challenges towards the empire's decline, emphasizing the essential role of domestic factors in shaping the Ottoman Empire's

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<sup>51</sup> M. Akif Aydın, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi* (İstanbul: Beta Basım, 2014), 417.

<sup>52</sup> Aydın, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi*, 417.

<sup>53</sup> Aydın, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi*, 418.

<sup>54</sup> Aydın, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi*, 418.

legal landscape. These reforms were vital responses to fundamental societal and educational changes, featuring the imperative of adapting the legal system to evolving circumstances.

## 1.2. External Reasons

During the Tanzimat era, the Ottoman Empire experienced profound transformations driven by external pressures, notably from the economic and strategic shifts initiated by Western nations. The onset of the Industrial Revolution in the West brought forth significant changes, as new production techniques fueled economic expansion, leading to increased supply and reduced prices. This economic surge incentivized Western powers to seek out new markets, positioning the Ottoman Empire as a vital strategic target. Concurrently, the predominance of non-Muslims within the empire's trading sphere highlighted the international forces guiding these developments.<sup>55</sup> The pivotal moment arrived with the signing of the *Balta Limanı* Treaty with England in 1838, marking an expansion of trade relations and setting the stage for deeper commercial ties in subsequent agreements.<sup>56</sup> These external influences, combined with internal reform efforts, shaped the Tanzimat era as a critical juncture in Ottoman history, defined by a dense relationship between global economic forces and domestic policy initiatives.

Moreover, the Ottoman Empire faced a decline in military power exacerbated by the capitulations granted to European countries, thus subsequently facilitated Western intervention in its internal affairs.<sup>57</sup> The capitulations, coupled with the protectionist policies of Western states, spurred the economic development of non-Muslim minorities within the empire.<sup>58</sup> Concurrently, Western powers applied pressure on the Ottomans to grant specific rights to these minorities, aiming to bolster their influence and prestige among these crucial trade intermediaries. Influenced by emerging ideals of nationalism and secularism from the French Revolution, non-Muslim minorities advocated for privileges and rights, supported by European states seeking to

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<sup>55</sup> Akif Emre Öktem, *Uluslararası Hukukta İnanç Özgürlüğü* (Ankara: Liberte Yayınevi, 2002), 64.

<sup>56</sup> Aydın, *Hukuk Tarihi*, 419.

<sup>57</sup> Aydın, *Hukuk Tarihi*, 419.

<sup>58</sup> Eyüp Kaptan, *Lozan Konferansında Azınlıklar Sorunu* (İstanbul: Harp Akademileri Yayını, 2002), 23.

expand their political and legal sway within Ottoman territories.<sup>59</sup> These external pressures and influences played a significant role in driving transformative changes during the Tanzimat era within the Ottoman Empire, reshaping its internal dynamics and relationships with Western nations.

In conclusion, the legal changes witnessed during the Tanzimat period in the Ottoman Empire were largely driven by external pressures. The interference of European great powers, leveraging the pretext of minority rights, prompted the declaration of the Tanzimat Edict in 1839. This external influence led to a fundamental shift in the Ottoman community system from religion-based to a new evolving concept of Ottoman citizenship. Subsequently, efforts were made to standardize legal status of all residents regardless of religion, aiming to eliminate previous disparities and subject everyone to the same legal framework. The aim of these legal reforms was to prevent state fragmentation and reduce foreign interference by presenting a unified legal front to the Western world. They reflect the significant impact of external pressures on the legal transformations that defined the Tanzimat era.

## **2. Proclamation of the Tanzimat Edict**

The proclamation of the Tanzimat Edict marked a profound transformation driven by the underlying factors that spurred the Tanzimat reforms. This edict responded to the urgent need within the Ottoman Empire for new laws, prompted by a weakening caused by the deviation from Sharia laws over the previous 150 years. According to Lewis, the edict established fundamental rights and assurances, including life security without religious discrimination among Ottoman subjects, protection of honor and chastity, prohibition of confiscation, right to property, taxation based on financial capacity, guarantees in criminal proceedings, and the

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<sup>59</sup> M. Akif Aydın, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Hukuk ve Adalet* (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2014), 266.

principle of lawful state expenditures.<sup>60</sup> In essence, new laws were introduced to ensure the protection of life, property, honor, and residence for both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The issuance of the Tanzimat Edict highlighted a commitment to safeguarding personal rights such as life, property, and honor under the law. Its inaugural article declared, “Certain new laws are necessary for governing the state and the nation. These laws are designed to secure life, honor, and property, establish taxation policies, and organize military service periods.”<sup>61</sup> Consequently, all Ottoman subjects, regardless of religious affiliation, were guaranteed equitable rights and protections in the realms of human rights, criminal law, and taxation. The decree emphasized the necessity of comprehensive legal regulations to ensure equality before the law for all Ottoman subjects, irrespective of religion. It explicitly stated, “Our Muslim subjects and the members of other religious communities (*millet*), without exception, are guaranteed full protection by us according to Sharia law in matters concerning life, honor, chastity, and property, for them to benefit equally from these permissions.”<sup>62</sup> This objective was closely linked to the establishment of legal and judicial unity across the empire.

The Tanzimat period witnessed an altering shift towards a new legal order independent of Islamic law, characterized by its secular nature. Importantly, the adoption of legal frameworks from France, including Commercial, Criminal, and Procedural laws, played a key role in modernizing the Ottoman legal system. Despite these reforms, the influence of pre-Tanzimat interpretations of Sharia law persisted, continuing to shape legal developments within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence but now supported by new legislative measures.

Building upon these legal reforms, notable enactments during the Tanzimat era included *Cezâ Kanunnamesi* (Penal Code) (1840), *Kanun-i Cedit* (1851), the Land Code (1858), and the *Mecelle*

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<sup>60</sup> Bernard Lewis, *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu* (Ankara: Arkadaş Yayınları, 2015), 149- 150.

<sup>61</sup> Halil İncılık, “Sened-i İttifak ve Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu”, in *Tanzimat Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, ed. Mehmet Seyitdanlıoğlu, Halil İncılık (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2012), 99-102.

<sup>62</sup> Halil İncılık, “Sened-i İttifak ve Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayunu,” 252.

(1868). These laws were designed to address specific needs but exhibited deficiencies in both form and content. In the following section, I will explore the implications of these laws concerning slaves and their place within the legal framework of the Tanzimat period.

### 3. Legal Status of Slaves in Tanzimat-Era Reforms

Islamic law, or Sharia, provided the legal framework governing slavery, offering specific regulations and rights for slaves and their owners. Owners were obliged to treat their slaves with humanity; failure to do so could prompt a judge to intervene, potentially resulting in the sale or emancipation of the slave. Aydın asserts that under Sharia, slavery was considered a state of incomplete legal capacity rather than a total absence of rights.<sup>63</sup> This means that slaves had limited rights, such as no ownership of property—everything they earned belonged to their master. However, slaves who entered into a freedom agreement, known as *mükateb*, could retain some earnings.<sup>64</sup> Although slaves could not inherit due to their status, they could incur debts and were liable for certain wrongdoings. In cases of wrongdoing, the master was responsible for compensating for the slave's actions or could consent to selling the slave to settle such matters.<sup>65</sup> Sharia also required owners to treat their slaves with humanity; failure to do so could prompt legal intervention, potentially leading to the sale or emancipation of the slave. This complicated system of rights and responsibilities within the Sharia framework characterized the management of slavery in the Ottoman Empire.

Despite the Tanzimat reforms' pursuit of legal equality, they notably did not address the abolition or regulation of slavery, which persisted within the Ottoman Empire during this period. However, it's important to note that while the edict pursued legal equality, it did not address the abolition or regulation of slavery, which persisted within the Ottoman Empire during this period. Despite introducing reforms and changes, the institution of slavery remained outside the scope

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<sup>63</sup> Aydın, *Hukuk Tarihi*, 232.

<sup>64</sup> Aydın, *Hukuk Tarihi*, 221-22.

<sup>65</sup> Aydın, *Hukuk Tarihi*, 222.

of the Tanzimat reforms. The absence of new regulations related to slavery in the edict indicates that there were no substantive changes to the provisions governing slavery, which continued to be based on Sharia law.

During the Tanzimat era, as bureaucrats addressed legal matters concerning non-Muslim subjects, the status of slaves was characterized by ambiguity and exclusion. Slaves could not benefit from the new regulations, and the institution of slavery continued to operate under old rules, neglected by the reforms. This period also saw the emergence of abolitionist movements gaining traction alongside increased diplomatic engagement between the Ottoman Empire and Western powers. Despite legal reforms emphasizing equality and uniformity before the law, slaves remained outside the scope of these protections, with their fundamental rights disregarding within the evolving legal framework.

To comprehend the legal standing of slaves during this era and assess any potential impact of the edict, I will analyze their status from three viewpoints: first, in terms of family and inheritance, and second, in relation to criminal law and third in terms of property status. This dual perspective will provide insights into the specific legal frameworks governing slaves' rights and responsibilities within Ottoman society, shedding light on how the Tanzimat reforms may have influenced their legal status and treatment.

### **3.1. Family and Inheritance Rights of Slaves**

The legal reforms implemented during the Tanzimat period significantly shaped family law and inheritance regulations within the Ottoman Empire. Despite these advancements, the rights of slaves remained unaffected by these reforms and continued to be governed by Sharia law. The Tanzimat edict excluded slaves from the legal protections and rights granted to other subjects, revealing a stark disparity in the treatment of various subjects. While the reforms aimed to promote equality and modernization, they underlined persistent challenges in addressing entrenched institutions like slavery within the evolving legal framework.

In this period, significant changes were made to family law; however, these reforms did not extend to the rights and status of slaves within family structures. While there were advancements in legal frameworks affecting marriage and divorce for free subjects, enslaved individuals remained subject to distinct regulations under Sharia law. In terms of family law concerning slaves, both male and female slaves faced marriage restrictions requiring their master's permission. Under Sharia law, a slave's ability to marry is dependent on the master's consent, as slaves and concubines cannot marry without it. This consent is crucial because a slave's marriage carries significant financial implications and can affect property ownership for the master.<sup>66</sup> A slave's marital status is important due to the associated financial obligations, such as bridal gifts and alimony, which fall upon the master.<sup>67</sup> Slaves maintained a limited right to marry under Sharia law, and this aspect remained unaffected by the legal changes introduced by the regulations. The Tanzimat reformers did not perceive this situation as problematic. In fact, in many instances, they entered marriages with household slaves and practiced polygamy. This acceptance of the practice was widely embraced among reformists. For instance, Namık Kemal, viewing it as a means of population increase, did not oppose it.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Ahmet Midhat Efendi highlighted the insatiable nature of men's sexual desires, advocating for the necessity of polygamy.<sup>69</sup>

Regarding divorce among slaves, a noteworthy aspect was that a slave husband had full authority to initiate divorce proceedings without needing consent from his master, which distinguished divorce autonomy from other aspects of slave ownership.<sup>70</sup> In contrast to free individuals, who had the right to divorce their spouse with three divorces, a slave could divorce

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<sup>66</sup> Stephan Conermann, and Gül Şen, "Slavery is Not Slavery: On Slaves and Slave Agency in the Ottoman Empire—Introduction," *Slaves and Slave Agency in the Ottoman Empire* (2020): 14.

<sup>67</sup> Conermann, and Şen, "Slavery is Not Slavery..."14.

<sup>68</sup> Tuba Demirci, *Body, Disease and Late Ottoman Literature: Debates on Ottoman Muslim Family in the Tanzimat Period (1839-1908)* (Ph.D. diss., Bilkent University, 2008), 301.

<sup>69</sup> Jale Parla, *Babalar ve Oğullar: Tanzimat Romanının Epistemolojik Temelleri*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 38 quoted Demirci, *Body, Disease and Late Ottoman Literature*, 286.

<sup>70</sup> Aydın, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi*, 264.

his wife with two divorces. This difference in the number of permissible divorces stresses distinctions in legal rights and procedures based on status within the Ottoman legal system.

The *İrade-i Seniyye* issued in 1847 and 1858 brought about substantial changes to inheritance laws, primarily aimed at advancing gender equality in property ownership. The Tanzimat reforms of the mid-19th century brought about substantial improvements in inheritance rights, reflecting a commitment to gender equality. Legal reforms introduced in 1847 and 1858 facilitated significant changes in the transfer of miri land, aiming to establish more inclusive inheritance practices.<sup>71</sup>

Building upon previous progress, the Land Code of 1858 further expanded inheritance eligibility by granting inheritance rights to the parents of the deceased. As an expanded version of Sharia provisions, the code provided more detailed regulations covering various categories of heirs.<sup>72</sup> This comprehensive regulation enabled the mother of the deceased to be included as an heir, which was not included in the previous sharia provisions in traditional inheritance practices.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the Land Code granted equal inheritance rights to grandchildren (son's son and son's daughter) and to siblings (mother, brothers, and sisters) who collectively held property titles. Overall, these legal changes represented important strides in inheritance law during the Tanzimat period.

However, these progressive reforms did not extend to slaves, as slavery remained a significant obstacle to inheritance rights. Slaves were not afforded any right to own property, and any inheritance due to them automatically transferred to their masters upon the death of the individual from whom they would have inherited. This arrangement contradicted fundamental principles of inheritance law, as slaves lacked assets to bequeath as testamentary heirs.

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<sup>71</sup> S. Gül Akyılmaz, "Osmanlı Miras Hukukunda Kadının Statüsü," *Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, 11.1 (2007): 490-91.

<sup>72</sup> As an example, please see the 11th and 12th verses of the Surah An-Nisa.

<sup>73</sup> Akyılmaz, "Osmanlı Miras Hukukunda Kadının Statüsü," 490.

Consequently, there were cases where a slave indirectly inherited property from their master due to this legal constraint within the inheritance system as it related to slavery during this period.

### 3.2. Status of Slaves in Terms of Criminal Law

When examining the criminal laws of the period, it is notable that, unlike inheritance law, slaves were not explicitly included within these laws. Instead, the criminal laws were formulated to encompass both Muslims and non-Muslims. For instance, the Penal Code of 1840, introduced shortly after the Tanzimat reforms as the era's inaugural legal code, reflected certain principles of legal equality and standardized punishment. However, notably, these provisions did not extend to cover slaves. The law was designed around the principle of governance equality. According to the first article of the preceding chapter, the law mandates that the state cannot take a person's life without conducting a necessary examination and investigation, and without impartially determining the person's guilt through court proceedings.<sup>74</sup> This provision established security of life against actions by the state, religious scholars, ministers, and civil servants, prohibiting any unauthorized interference with life security outside of legal procedures and principles, with retaliation specified for violations.

The significant first article of the preceding (*evvelî*) chapter confirms the principle of legal equality among individuals; if even a shepherd's life is threatened by one of the ministers, retaliation will be pursued against them. However, it's important to note that slaves were not included in this article, which was intended to ensure equality among all individuals regardless of social status. This omission emphasizes a gap in legal protections during the Tanzimat era, as the focus on legal equality did not extend comprehensively to include all members of Ottoman society, particularly those in servitude.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Rabia Beyza Candan, "1840 Tarihli Ceza Kanunname-i Hümayunu İncelemesi," *Anadolu Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi* 1.1 (2015): 76.

<sup>75</sup> Candan, "1840 Tarihli Ceza Kanunname-i Hümayunu İncelemesi," 76.

The same understanding continued in the *Kanun-i Cedid*, which came into force in 1851 and was an improved version of the penal code numbered 1840. This penal code, consisting of a total of 43 articles, addresses crucial aspects such as the safety of life, protection of property, and safeguarding of chastity and honor through specific provisions.<sup>76</sup> The articles within the code are dedicated to ensuring these fundamental rights and upholding the principles of justice and legal order within the Ottoman Empire. However, the provisions did not include slaves.

Regarding crimes necessitating retribution, there was no distinction between slaves and free people in cases of intentional killings. This means that if a slave deliberately killed someone, whether free or slave, and all conditions for retaliation were met, the slave would face retaliation like a free person. In the event a slave was killed, Hanafi jurists believed that retaliation would be sought from a free person, provided all conditions were met.<sup>77</sup> In such cases, the principle of equal retribution accentuated the legal treatment of slaves and free individuals in matters of intentional homicide under Islamic law.

Slaves were not recognized as persons under criminal law, and their rights varied depending on the crimes committed. Depending on the offense, slaves were sometimes treated as free persons and at other times as slaves. In cases where punishment could be reduced by half for crimes with excessive penalties, slaves received half the punishment imposed on free individuals. For instance, in the crime of adultery, since slaves were not obligated, they received half of the 100-lash penalty given to free people, and similarly for offenses like drinking alcohol and *kazf* (accusation of adultery).<sup>78</sup> However, for crimes such as theft where punishment could not be halved, slaves received the same punishment as free individuals.

A notable case that illuminates the treatment of slaves in the Ottoman legal system is that of Mustafa Bey's black slave, who was accused of theft in 1845. This slave, owned by Mustafa

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<sup>76</sup> Aydın, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi*, 426.

<sup>77</sup> Aydın, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi*, 234.

<sup>78</sup> Aydın, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi*, 234.

Bey, a prominent official, was apprehended for stealing valuables from his master's residence. The incident presented a legal challenge, as the existing penal code did not explicitly address crimes committed by slaves. The *Meclis-i Vela-yi Adliye* (MVAA), responsible for law drafting, deliberated on the matter, emphasizing the need to prevent abuses of power by masters and maintain societal order. Consequently, the council decided to treat offending slaves similarly to free individuals under the penal code, ensuring accountability and deterrence.<sup>79</sup> This reflects a key aspect of the Ottoman legal system during the Tanzimat period, grappling with establishing fair punishment standards for slaves, aligning them with those for free individuals despite existing legal limitations. The council's decision aimed to curb abuses by slave owners and promote legal equity within the Ottoman framework.

Another compelling case is that of Nursiye, a slave accused of murder in 1845. Nursiye was charged with strangling Ümmükülüm, the daughter of Molla Yakup, and disposing of her body in their residence. Initially sentenced to death by the local council, Nursiye's fate underwent the legal process outlined by the MVAA. Ultimately, the council decided to commute Nursiye's sentence from death to one year in a women's penitentiary. After serving her prison term, Nursiye was to be released into the custody of the trustee of the victim's heirs, demonstrating a shift in legal perspective toward treating slaves' criminal actions with the same seriousness as those of free individuals.<sup>80</sup>

These cases exemplify the complex legal framework surrounding slavery during the Tanzimat period, where slaves were considered the property of their masters but were treated as free individuals under specific circumstances, particularly in matters of crime and punishment. Although the Ottomans viewed slaves as property, slaves like Nursiye underwent legal

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<sup>79</sup> Toledano, "The legislative process in the Ottoman Empire in the early Tanzimat period: a footnote," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 11.2 (1980): 101.

<sup>80</sup> Toledano, "The legislative process in the Ottoman Empire in the early Tanzimat period: a footnote," 102-103.

proceedings similar to those of free people. This shows the contradictory way the Ottoman legal system dealt with slavery.

During the Tanzimat period in the Ottoman Empire, the criminal law framework underwent significant reforms aimed at addressing the treatment and legal status of slaves in relation to criminal offenses. Slaves were not afforded the status of free individuals and were subject to distinct legal considerations. In major offenses like theft and murder, slaves were treated similarly to free individuals, facing comparable penalties based on the severity of their crimes. However, in other cases, slaves were subjected to reduced punishments, reflecting their subordinate legal status within the Ottoman legal system. This legal framework highlighted the complex and unequal treatment of slaves, with their rights and legal standing varying depending on the specific circumstances of the crimes involved. Efforts were made to prevent excessive punishment by slave owners and ensure fair adjudication of cases involving slaves, aligning with broader initiatives to modernize legal practices and uphold principles of justice during this transformative period.

### **3.3. The Property Status of Slaves**

During the Tanzimat period, while extensive reforms were implemented affecting various aspects of Ottoman society, the institution of slavery, governed by Sharia law, remained largely unaffected by these changes. Slavery persisted amidst uncertainty regarding its legal standing and was notably excluded from most rights afforded to free individuals. This treatment was primarily rooted in legislators' prevailing perception of slaves as property. Despite their limited rights, the property status of slaves was explicitly defined and regulated during this period. Legislators and regulators of the era addressed the sale, purchase, and emancipation of slaves as distinct legal matters. The *Mecelle*, considered one of the most influential legal codes of its time, is particularly noteworthy for its treatment of slaves as commodities and its regulation of their buying and selling. This legal framework provided detailed guidelines governing transactions involving slaves,

reflecting the different view of slaves as chattel during the era in which it was promulgated. The *Mecelle's* provisions highlighted the commercial nature of slaves' status within the legal system, emphasizing their treatment as goods subject to trade and commerce.

### 3.3.1. Mecelle

The *Mecelle*, considered the foremost legal work of the Tanzimat period's legal reforms, embodies a dual nature, particularly evident in criminal cases. This code holds immense importance as the first Muslim-Turkish civil code. Under the leadership of *Divân-ı Ahkâm-ı Adliye* Minister Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, the *Mecelle* Society, comprised of four members, diligently worked from 1868 to 1876 to compile the *Mecelle-i Ahkâm-ı Adliye*, also known simply as the *Mecelle*.<sup>81</sup> Each section of the *Mecelle*, termed as a *kitap* (book), was presented in completed form to the Ottoman State Sultan for enactment through either the Council of Ministers or the *Şeyhülislam*.

Comprising 16 books, the *Mecelle* begins with an initial part (preface) and 99 articles covering general provisions. This compilation, designed using the classical casuistic system of Islamic law, contains a total of 1851 articles. Among these, 1100 articles pertain to property and obligations law, 400 relate to procedural law, 200 concern commercial law, and 100 address general legal principles.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, criticisms based solely on the large number of articles within the *Mecelle* are not warranted, as it encompasses the content of multiple laws rather than constituting a single law.

The treatment of slaves within the *Mecelle* reflects a dualistic legal perspective. Although slaves were not explicitly addressed in relation to personal law, specific provisions within the *Mecelle* featured their diminished human status. Article 88 of the *Mecelle* illustrates this perspective with its statement, “The burden is relative to the blessing and the blessing is relative to the

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<sup>81</sup> Ahmet Şimşirgil, E. Buğra Ekinci, *Ahmet Cevdet Paşa ve Mecelle* (İstanbul: KTB Yayınları, 2008), 51.

<sup>82</sup> Mücahit Ceylan “Mecelle-i Ahkâm-ı Adliyye'nin hazırlanışı, uygulanması ve kapsamı,” *Adalet Dergisi* 66 (2021): 713.

burden.”<sup>83</sup> This article stipulated that the *diyet* (compensation) for harm or injury inflicted on a slave was half that of a free person. The rule of law should not distinguish between citizens based on blessings nor discriminate based on the burdens endured. Apart from the general burdens shared by all members of society, those facing hardships beyond what they can reasonably bear alone should have their burdens distributed within society. This notion underlines the importance of achieving equality among all members of society in terms of the burdens they bear. This principle, recognized in doctrine and jurisprudence as equality against public burdens, emphasizes the significance of fairness and shared responsibility within legal and societal frameworks.

Moreover, the second article of the second section of the *Mecelle* elucidates that the validity of certain acts, such as marriage, divorce, sale, emancipation, and others, is determined solely by their outward expression, treating the slave as a commodity. In these legal contexts, the actual intent or consent of the individual involved is disregarded, emphasizing the formalities of the actions over personal agency or autonomy. For instance, if someone declares “I sold this property” and the buyer agrees, the sale is legally binding regardless of the seller's intent.<sup>84</sup> This legal principle further stresses the dehumanization of slaves within the Ottoman legal system, highlighting their status as objects governed by external formalities rather than individuals with inherent rights or considerations of personhood.<sup>85</sup>

*Mecelle*, beyond its introductory provisions, includes the book *Kitabu'l-Biyyû*, which serves as the sales contract section and the initial part of the *Mecelle*, focusing extensively on trade principles. This segment covers a range of topics such as buying, selling, return, exchange, and notably, includes numerous provisions specifically concerning slaves as commodities. Detailed

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<sup>83</sup> “Külfet nimete ve nimet külfete göredir.” Şimşirgil, Ekinci, *Abmet Cevdet Paşa ve Mecelle*, 83.

<sup>84</sup> “Certain acts do not require intent to have legal consequences. For instance, actions like marriage, divorce, sale, grant, rent, will, slave emancipation, power of attorney, promise giving, loan granting, and false accusation operate in this manner. In other words, when specific terms are used to enact these actions, their legal effect is binding regardless of the individual's intention. For instance, if someone states “I sold this property” and the buyer agrees, the seller cannot later claim they did not intend to sell the property. Similarly, intent is not a consideration in cases of theft (*sirkat*.)” Şimşirgil, Ekinci, *Abmet Cevdet Paşa ve Mecelle*, 88.

<sup>85</sup> *Feteva-i Hindiyye (Feteva-i Alemgiriyye)*, Akçağ Yayınları: 5/292-308.

insights into the legal and commercial aspects of slave transactions are provided within this chapter, illuminating the various legal conditions governing these practices. The provisions within *Kitabu'l-Biyyû* emphasise the treatment of slaves as tradable goods within the *Mecelle's* legal framework, emphasizing their status as items subject to commercial transactions. Since slaves are regarded as property within this book, discussions pertaining to slaves are integrated under nearly every topic or heading related to trade, including contract formation, offer and acceptance, entitlement, delivery, coercion in sales, hoarding, and pricing.

In matters of slave ownership and emancipation, specific rules govern the legal status of slave owners. For instance, if a purchaser releases a slave or marries them before taking possession and subsequently faces bankruptcy, they forfeit any claim to the slave's freedom; however, the slave remains emancipated despite the owner's financial situation.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, if a customer emancipates or marries a slave before taking possession, or if these actions are performed at the customer's request by the seller, they are deemed valid.<sup>87</sup> Notably, emancipating a pregnant concubine's child prior to possession is not considered valid as it may not legitimize the concubine's emancipation.

Conversely, if a customer emancipates a slave within three days of purchase, this action is valid, granting the slave freedom.<sup>88</sup> Disputes over excess payments in cases involving the right of option hinge on differing interpretations; according to Imam Abu Hanifa, excess payment reverts to the seller upon sale cancellation, whereas other Imams maintain it belongs to the customer. Moreover, if a seller provides a three-day option and emancipates the slave within this period, the sale is void but the emancipation remains valid; however, emancipating a concubine during this time completes the sale.<sup>89</sup> Simultaneous emancipation of both a slave and concubine results in their freedom, yet the customer's right to emancipate under these circumstances is not

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<sup>86</sup> Feteva-i Hindiyye (Feteva-i Alemgiriyye), Akçağ Yayınları: 5/121-124.

<sup>87</sup> Feteva-i Hindiyye, 5/186-202.

<sup>88</sup> Feteva-i Hindiyye, 5/174-178.

<sup>89</sup> Feteva-i Hindiyye, 5/178-183.

recognized as valid. These provisions operate oppositely if a customer holds the right of option, emphasizing the important legal framework surrounding slave transactions and emancipation.

The *Mecelle*'s treatment of slaves offers a unique perspective into Ottoman legal attitudes towards slavery. Particularly in its provisions, notably within *Kitabu'l-Biyyâ*, the code delves into the legal framework surrounding slave ownership and transactions, showing rules and conditions governing these practices. A significant aspect highlighted is the depiction of slaves as tradable commodities subject to commercial transactions, as detailed procedures for buying, selling, and transferring ownership are outlined within the code. This formalistic approach prioritizes legal formalities over considerations of individual rights and agency. Additionally, the code's provisions on emancipation reveal a complicated legal framework. For example, rules regarding emancipation before possession or during specified option periods carry distinct legal consequences, showcasing the relationship between legal principles and societal norms concerning slave ownership and freedom.

### **BRITISH INFLUENCE ON ABOLITIONIST EFFORTS IN TANZIMAT ERA**

In the expansive 19th century, European powers undertook concerted and organized efforts to abolish slavery, with a primary focus on ending the Transatlantic slave trade rather than tackling slavery. Britain, wielding significant economic influence globally, particularly aimed to control the slave trade. Data from that era reveals Britain's substantial involvement in the slave trade. Between 1791 and 1805, British ships transported more than half of the forcibly enslaved individuals. Additionally, slave labor played a crucial role in sugar production in the West Indies, where British colonies like Jamaica and Trinidad contributed to over half of the world's sugar output by 1805.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (North Carolina: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2010), 172.

Given Britain's substantial involvement in the slave trade, it was understandable that Britain sought to control key commercial routes influenced by the Ottoman Empire. Among these routes, those passing through North Africa, the Red Sea, Gulf-Iraq and the Circassian and Georgian traffic were of utmost importance and aligned closely with England's economic interests.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, Britain encouraged the Ottomans to implement measures considered as the Ottomans' initial steps against slavery and the slave trade.<sup>92</sup> Before delving into diplomatic relations, it is beneficial to examine the institution of slavery during the Tanzimat period.

At the outset of the Tanzimat era, the Ottoman Empire's enslaved population encompassed women and men, of diverse backgrounds including both black and white, serving in domestic roles and within the harem.<sup>93</sup> Each year, a consistent influx of approximately 11,000 to 13,000 slaves entered the empire from Africa and the Caucasus, transported through various routes including the Sahara Desert, the Ethiopian plateau, the Red Sea, the Nile Valley, the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, the Black Sea, and the pilgrimage routes to and from Arabia.<sup>94</sup> The primary methods of acquiring slaves during this period included capturing individuals in war, kidnapping, paying tribute or taxes, enslavement due to debt, abandoning or selling children, voluntary self-enslavement, and enslavement by birth.<sup>95</sup> The predominant method of acquiring slaves was undoubtedly through trade. The abundance of slaves obtained through trade revitalized the slave market in the 19th century. According to Toledano's estimation, although not definitive, the annual importation of black and white slaves into the empire (excluding Egypt) was approximately 13,000 in the third quarter of the 19th century and around 10,000 for most of the century.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 54.

<sup>92</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 39.

<sup>93</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s):"483.

<sup>94</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s):"483.

<sup>95</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 44-54.

<sup>96</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 55.

During the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire witnessed significant shifts in its slave trade dynamics. While the supply of Caucasian slaves declined from the 17th century onward, with wars becoming less significant as a source of slaves, there was a corresponding increase in the importation of black slaves from Africa. Limited availability and high costs constrained the number of Caucasian slaves in the empire, primarily used for military or domestic labor. The arrival of Circassian refugees fleeing Russian oppression in the mid-19th century brought a substantial influx of white slaves, revitalizing the Ottoman slavery system temporarily. However, Ottoman government policies from around 1865 hastened the decline of the Circassian slavery system and overall slavery within the empire. Advancements in transportation, such as the opening of the Suez Canal and steamship routes, facilitated the transportation of slaves from African regions to Ottoman territories. Despite efforts to ban black slave trade in 1857, the practice continued with some resilience until the late 19th century, when both black and white slave trade directed towards the Ottoman Empire experienced a notable decline, ultimately disappearing by the early 20th century.<sup>97</sup>

The segment of society that most extensively used slaves was undoubtedly the urban, wealthy class.<sup>98</sup> Predominantly, these slaves were employed as house servants. Unlike in Europe, where slaves were often used for agricultural labor, in Turkey, slavery was perceived as more domestic in nature.<sup>99</sup> This distinction is highlighted by the British ambassador in Stratford Redcliffe's observation:

*Unlike the negro in America, the slave in Turkey is rather a domestic servant than a field-drudge or beast of burthen. He is not ostensibly illtreated. If a male he rises occasionally to posts of profit and honour; if a female, ease and even luxury may be her portion in the Harem of some court favourite or affluent functionary.*<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 57-58.

<sup>98</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s)," 479.

<sup>99</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 62.

<sup>100</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 62-63.

As evident from the overview of the slavery institution in the 19th century, ownership and trade of slaves were legally permitted and widely accepted by society. Apart from instances involving extreme cruelty and abuse, which were rare exceptions, there was little moral questioning of the practice. European states were only beginning to initiate the abolition of slavery during this period.<sup>101</sup> For the Ottoman Empire, slavery became a significant issue due to British initiatives, essentially problematizing slavery within the empire.

The English first took action against slavery and the slave trade in Ottoman territories in 1840, when Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston instructed Britain's ambassador in Istanbul, Lord Ponsonby, to send directives twice in August and November of the same year.<sup>102</sup> In 1840, the British government-initiated action against slavery independently. This initiative was largely influenced by the activities of abolitionists in Britain advocating for the end of slavery. After reorganizing under the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in 1839, these abolitionists declared their main objectives to be the abolition of slavery and the slave trade worldwide, following the achievement of their goals in British colonies.<sup>103</sup>

While public sentiment may have suggested otherwise, the government's primary objective was not the abolition of slavery, but rather the prevention of the slave trade. This stance led to significant diplomatic exchanges and pressures, marking the initial phases of gradual abolitionism within the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Abdülmecid's decisive action came in 1847<sup>104</sup> when he declared the prohibition of the slave trade, coinciding with the official closure of the *Üsküdar* slave market.<sup>105</sup> The Sultan ordered the immediate closure of the Slave Market, emphasizing that matters related to slave sales would henceforth be conducted particularly in

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<sup>101</sup> Toledano, "Late Ottoman concepts of Slavery (1830s-1880s):"480.

<sup>102</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 68.

<sup>103</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 70.

<sup>104</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 39.

<sup>105</sup> İsmail Parlatur, "Osmanlı Sosyal Hayatından Köleliğin Kaldırılışı," *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 31.1-2 (1987): 419.

accordance with “Islamic sources.”<sup>106</sup> This decision was prompted by concerns that mistreatment of slaves at slave markets<sup>107</sup> and the presence of a slave market in the midst of the Westernizing capital would tarnish the empire's image.<sup>108</sup>

British efforts to address the Ottoman Empire's involvement in the black slave trade began around 1838, prompting initial Ottoman steps to restrict or prohibit this trade. However, the pivotal moment came in 1856 during the Paris Peace Conference that concluded the Crimean War. At this conference, British leaders pushed for the abolition of slavery in the Ottoman Empire, with Prime Minister Palmerston advocating for its inclusion on the agenda, despite facing criticism for misrepresentation. In response, abolition advocates pressed Palmerston to immediately halt both the slave trade and slavery within the empire. The British argued that true abolition required preventing the slave trade, dismissing the idea of preserving slavery as a native institution in Turkey as unjustifiable and sinful. They suggested that Christian powers should intervene on behalf of the Christian slaves, a position driven by domestic pressures and a collection of evidence supporting their abolitionist stance.<sup>109</sup>

While the Ottoman Empire implemented decisions to prohibit the slave trade and abolish slave markets, it sometimes acted inconsistently with these policies. Two decrees dated 1848 highlight this contradiction. The first decree approved covering travel expenses for slaves and concubines sent by the ruler of Tripoli, while the second decree detailed a list of slaves who arrived in Istanbul. Another notable incident occurred after 1860 when Circassians fleeing Russian raids were resettled around Trabzon and Samsun. Due to economic hardships, slave markets emerged in these areas where Circassians were sold.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 95.

<sup>107</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 95.

<sup>108</sup> EHUD R. TOLEDANO, *Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression 1840-1890*, Vol. 629. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 261 quoted in Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 95.

<sup>109</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 74-75.

<sup>110</sup> Parlatur, “Osmanlı Sosyal Hayatından Köleliğin Kaldırılışı,” 420.

Despite ongoing legal reforms, the institution and trade of slavery persisted within the Ottoman Empire. This situation led to the initiation of a new treaty, the Anglo-Ottoman slave-trade convention, between the Ottoman Empire and England in 1880, driven by pressure from England. In this treaty, the Ottoman Empire committed to prohibiting the transportation and importation of African slaves into Ottoman territories and their passage by sea.<sup>111</sup> Those engaged in the slave transportation business, including slave traders and crew members, would face prosecution and punishment under the law.

One significant outcome of the treaty was its demonstration of the ongoing legality of slavery within the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, it aimed to completely eradicate the slave trade by adding a prohibition on importing African slaves into the country, in addition to the ban on introducing African slaves into Ottoman territories imposed by the 1857 decree.<sup>112</sup> Another notable aspect of the treaty was the authorization granted to British ships to inspect Ottoman vessels. British authorities could arrest individuals involved in the slave trade on ships they visited and hand them over to Ottoman authorities for prosecution.<sup>113</sup>

In 1889, the Ottoman Empire enacted legislation prohibiting the African Slave Trade, effectively banning this commerce across all Ottoman territories. This law expressly forbade the trade, import, export, and transportation of African slaves within the empire's borders. However, while this regulation aimed to prevent the introduction of new slaves into the country, it did not include provisions for granting freedom to existing slaves.<sup>114</sup>

The Ottoman Empire's second effort to combat the slave trade occurred at the 1889 Brussels Conference. During this international gathering held on November 18, 1889, a general document was signed to prevent the African slave trade. Subsequently, on July 2, 1890, a detailed

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<sup>111</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 67.

<sup>112</sup> Gül Akyılmaz, "Osmanlı Hukukunda Köleliğin Sona Ermesi ile İlgili Düzenlemeler ve Tanzimat Fermanı'nın İlanından sonra Kölelik Müessesesi," *Gazî Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, C 9 (2004):231.

<sup>113</sup> Akyılmaz, "Osmanlı Hukukunda Köleliğin Sona Ermesi ile İlgili Düzenlemeler ve Tanzimat Fermanı'nın İlanından sonra Kölelik Müessesesi,"235.

<sup>114</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 142-144.

agreement outlined measures to prevent the importation of slaves into countries where this trade persisted. The document's sections detailed specific measures, including preventing slave arrivals by land and sea, supervising highways and caravans, and implementing measures against sea-borne slave trading. The fourth section highlighted states still maintaining slavery, emphasizing more stringent supervision in these regions. Article 68 of the document commended the Ottoman State for its 1889 decree that prohibited the African slave trade.<sup>115</sup> The 1889 law and the adoption of the Brussels decisions marked the final measures taken against the black slave trade and slavery in the Ottoman Empire. Following the conference, the British administration eased its pressure on the Ottoman Empire and generally limited its actions to occasional protests in cases of law violations.<sup>116</sup>

Considering the historical argument presented, it becomes evident that the Ottoman Empire's response to British influence on the slave trade was shaped by external pressures. However, Britain's focus on ending the slave trade, rather than slavery itself, led to the adoption of less effective measures by the Ottomans. Despite efforts such as attending international conferences and closing slave markets, legal frameworks like Mecelle's *Kitabu'l-Büyyû* spells continued to regulate the buying and selling of slaves, perpetuating the existence of slavery in Ottoman society. This highlights a period marked by societal and legal ambiguity, where slavery persisted amidst evolving international norms.

Slaves were frequently excluded within evolving legal and diplomatic systems. The measures regarding slavery and its trade sparked controversy within Ottoman society. While some believed slavery was crucial for regulating Muslim domestic life, others reacted strongly against these regulations. This discourse around slavery permeated public conversations and found its way into the literary works of the period. Writers often used slavery as a metaphorical

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<sup>115</sup> Abdullah Özdağ, "Afrika'da Esir Ticaretinin Yasaklanması: Brüksel Konferansı (1890)" *Bölgesel Araştırmalar Dergisi* 2.1 (2018): 259.

<sup>116</sup> Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise*, 144-145.

theme in their works, reflecting and critiquing societal views on the institution. The subsequent chapter will explore how writers of this era addressed slavery in their literary creations, examining the thematic and symbolic dimensions they employed to engage with this contentious issue within the Ottoman Empire.

## CHAPTER 2: INVESTIGATING THE DISCOURSE ON SLAVERY AMONG TANZIMAT WRITERS

In this chapter, I will delve into the concept of slavery as depicted by Tanzimat writers and discuss their treatment of this topic. I will begin with an overview of the Tanzimat writers, providing context on how the concept of freedom was positioned during this era. Following this, I will examine the works of key authors, including Ahmet Midhat Efendi's "Esaret" and "Acayibi Alem," Namık Kemal's "İntibah," Samipaşazade Sezai's "Sergüzeşt," and Nabızade Nazım's "Zehra."

My analysis reveals that while these writers did not unanimously advocate for abolition, they held a collective understanding of slavery. Apart from Ahmet Midhat Efendi, they refrained from directly engaging in abolitionist debates within their literary works. Instead, they maneuvered through internal and external pressures. Internally, they grappled with critical views on practices like slavery, suggesting a desire for reform within Ottoman society. They imbued themes of captivity and slavery with romantic and melancholic tones, implicitly critiquing the institution and advocating for humane treatment. Externally, particularly exemplified by Ahmet Midhat Efendi, they portrayed Ottoman society in a positive light to Western audiences. This dual messaging aimed to stress the complexity of slavery in the Ottoman context, advocating for its reform and eventual abolition while simultaneously defending it against Western criticisms. Through their narratives, these authors endeavored not only to humanize slaves but also to challenge Western perceptions of Ottoman slavery.

### 1. Reception of "Slavery" in Tanzimat Literature

The Tanzimat Edict heralded a period of profound transformation within Ottoman society, significantly influencing the realm of literature. This era saw the establishment of *Encümen-i Daniş* schools, dedicated to translating and preparing foreign works to enrich Ottoman culture.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Abdullah Uçman, *Encümen-i Daniş* (İstanbul: DİA, 1995), XI/177 quoted in Kenan Mermer, *Tanzimat'ın Cumhuriyet'e Değişen Metafizik ve Edebiyat Abdülhak Hamid Tarhan Örneği* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2014), 82.

Intellectuals actively promoted Westernization through literary endeavors, with translation emerging as a pivotal tool for cultural enrichment. Diverse literary genres such as newspapers, plays, novels, short stories, memoirs, criticism, and articles flourished, marking a significant departure from old tradition. Simultaneously, private newspapers thrived, serving as vital platforms for intellectual discourse and the dissemination of innovative ideas. These new genres, adopted from the West, allowed Ottoman literature to explore fresh content and themes, significantly expanding its scope and depth.

During the Tanzimat period, Turkish literature underwent a revolutionary shift, breaking free from centuries-old traditions to embrace more realistic and relatable life experiences. This departure transformed literary aesthetics and prompted profound explorations of societal issues, with slavery emerging as a poignant theme symbolizing the struggle for individual freedom and serving as a powerful allegory for broader societal reforms. Novels of this era often depicted narratives of enslaved individuals seeking liberation and challenging existing norms. As Akyüz asserted, Turkish literature during the Tanzimat period engaged directly with life, shedding the abstractness that characterized traditional literature steeped in rigid rules and clichés.<sup>118</sup> Artists of the Tanzimat period liberated themselves from these constraints, reflecting realistic life experiences and individual freedom in their works.

Inspired by the intellectual legacy of thinkers from the 1789 French Revolution, Ottoman poets and writers embarked on a spirited campaign against oppression, injustice, corruption, and societal stagnation.<sup>119</sup> Through their literary works, they propagated ideals such as homeland, nation, state, justice, rights, law, freedom, and constitutionalism. Unlike their predecessors, these writers prioritized art for societal impact, using these concepts to address pressing issues and

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<sup>118</sup> Kenan Akyüz, *Modern Türk Edebiyatının Ana Çizgileri (1860-1923)* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1979), 16.

<sup>119</sup> Zafer Toprak, "From plurality to unity: Codification and jurisprudence in the late Ottoman Empire" in *Ways to modernity in Greece and Turkey: Encounters with Europe 1850- 1950*, eds: A. Frangoudaki & Ç. Keyder (London-New York; I.B. Tauris, 2007), 27-29.

advocate for progressive change. Engaging with Western culture, Tanzimat intellectuals internalized new concepts of freedom, liberty, and equality, spurring significant discussions about equality and the abolition of slavery.

Tanzimat intellectuals lead a reevaluation of human freedom, acknowledging its inherent contradiction with the institution of slavery. Writers advocating for human freedom and equality gave priority to this issue, drawing inspiration from personal experiences within their families, exemplified by figures like Ahmet Midhat Efendi and Samipaşazade Sezai, as well as from Western literature. Within their literary works, these intellectuals frequently grappled with the theme of slavery, contrasting Ottoman practices with those of the West, with notable contributions from figures such as Ahmet Midhat Efendi. Artists, drawing from personal experiences and Western literature, depicted narratives of individuals forcibly separated from their homeland, loved ones, and families, sold into unfamiliar territories for profit. Through their works, they criticized the hardships endured by these individuals, emphasizing the importance of individual freedom, and treating people according to human values. While refraining from direct condemnation of the institution itself, they advocated for the humane treatment of slaves, stressing the significance of recognizing them as integral members of society and condemning their mistreatment. To better understand this, I will examine Ahmet Midhat Efendi's "Esaret" and "Acayib-i Alem," Namık Kemal's "İntibah," Samipaşazade Sezai's "Sergüzeşt," and Nabızade Nazım's "Zehra," mapping out how these writers navigated the understanding of slavery during the Tanzimat period.

## **2. Slavery Themes in Tanzimat Writers' Works (Unveiling Slavery: Perspectives from Tanzimat Writers' Novels)**

### **a. Ahmet Midhat Efendi (1844-1912)**

Ahmet Midhat Efendi was a pivotal figure in late 19th-century Ottoman literature and journalism, significantly shaping the cultural and intellectual landscape of his time. Born in the *Tophane* district of İstanbul, his mother was a Circassian displaced by the Russian

occupation, and his father was Anatolian.<sup>120</sup> This diverse heritage influenced his literary themes, particularly his portrayal of Circassian slaves.

Driven by a commitment to societal enlightenment and cultural rejuvenation, Midhat's versatile career spanned poetry, novels, short stories, and journalism. He fervently believed in literature's transformative power, advocating for its role in disseminating knowledge and fostering moral values. Midhat criticized superficial poetry and promoted the simplification of language to engage readers both intellectually and emotionally. Assuming the role of a literary mentor, Midhat aimed to propel modernization forward by introducing new genres to Turkish literature, including novels, short stories, and theater.<sup>121</sup> He believed literature should serve morality, society, religion, and the state.

While Ahmet Midhat Efendi did venture into theater, his primary focus remained on the novel, where he surpassed many of his contemporaries in terms of productivity. His literary journey commenced in 1870 with “Letaif-i Rivayat,” a collection of stories that later evolved into enduring novels.<sup>122</sup> These works tackled significant themes of the Tanzimat-era Turkish novel, including arranged marriages, women's education, their societal roles, and slavery. Of particular note is Midhat's scrutiny of slavery, evident in his works like “Esaret” from 1870 and “Acayib-i Alem” from 1882, where his focus lies on the treatment of slaves rather than the institution itself. Additionally, he draws comparisons between Ottoman and Western forms of slavery.

*i. Esaret (The Captivity)*<sup>123</sup>

Zeynel Bey, the protagonist of the story, leads a quiet life on his estate with his mother, widowed sister, and devoted nanny. Marriage has never been a priority for him, primarily due

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<sup>120</sup> M. Orhan Okay. “Ahmet Midhat Efendi,” TVD İslam Ansiklopedisi, 15.05.2024, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/ahmed-midhat-efendi>

<sup>121</sup> Okay, “Ahmet Midhat Efendi.”

<sup>122</sup> Okay, “Ahmet Midhat Efendi.”

<sup>123</sup> Ahmet Midhat Efendi, *Esaret*, by Hüseyin Alacatlı (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları,1999)

to the weighty responsibilities it entails. However, as time passes and he loses both his mother and sister, Zeynel begins to contemplate the need for companionship and stability in his life. This shift in perspective prompts him to reassess his circumstances and consider his future. Despite his personal aversion to the institution of slavery which he describes as exhibiting “fi‘l-i fecî vü kerîh” (ugly and disgusting), Zeynel finds himself acquiring an underage concubine (odalique) through a friend, creating a notable contradiction within the narrative. One of his close friends tries to convince Zeynel that he should experience marriage. Zeynel is very pleased with the girl and tries to alleviate her feelings of captivity as he marries her. The details surrounding the concubine's identity—her name, background, and how she came into Zeynel's household—are shrouded in mystery, underscoring her enigmatic presence. Despite her status, Zeynel treats her with respect and dignity, investing his time in educating her beyond the customary duties of a concubine. Although he does not view the concubine as a slave, he struggles to change her ingrained perception of captivity:

*Although I have firmly resolved in my heart to never regard this with a slave-like gaze, can the poor girl truly understand the nature and degree of this decision? How is that possible? Even if she were to grasp the essence and truth of my thoughts on slavery, this manner might seem strange to her, and perhaps she would continue to think, 'Am I not still a captive, capable of even causing death?' As long as the unfortunate girl entertains this idea, how could she not exert her utmost efforts to please me and thus try to escape from my torment and discipline in this way?<sup>124</sup>*

After stepping away from civil service, Zeynel's life undergoes a significant transformation when he welcomes two young slaves into his home: a boy aged eight or nine and a girl aged ten, facilitated by his friend Sıtkı Bey. Zeynel Bey acquires these slaves with the intention of raising them as his own children. Originating from the Caucasus, these children are instilled with strong moral values and are taught to read and write. Within a few years, their exceptional aptitude for science and music catches Zeynel's attention, marking them not only as children but as remarkable individuals. Zeynel's approach towards these enslaved children is distinctive; he does

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<sup>124</sup> Ahmet Midhat, *Esaret*, 14.

not treat them as mere property but rather embraces them as integral members of his family, providing them with a comprehensive education that spans various fields, including science and music.<sup>125</sup>

Zeynel's approach to slavery disrupts traditional perceptions, highlighting empathy and care instead of exploitation. Midhat employs this approach to convey his stance on the proper treatment of slaves. The author's ideology is subtly conveyed through the characters' attitudes. Specifically, when discussing the purchased slaves, the author articulates:

*There is nothing resembling slavery in this anymore. You adopt them as your own children. Just look at how beautifully this little one reads the newspaper!" saying this, he took out a newspaper from his bosom and started reading it eagerly, but soon I couldn't stand it anymore and immediately sent him to the harem. As per my instructions, 'Esirci Bey' (slave dealer) came in the evening and when I handed over two hundred and fifty liras for the young girl, the fellow said, "Sir! There's also a slave available. If you could see him (Fatin), he's even more beautiful and intelligent and reads very well. Plus, he comes from a very respectable background. His manners are also impeccable."<sup>126</sup>*

Zeynel Bey's adoption and education of the slaves he purchased not only exemplify Tanzimat writers' attitudes towards concubines but also reveal contrasting perspectives on captivity in Eastern and Western societies depicted in their works.<sup>127</sup> His actions symbolize a departure from conventional views on slavery prevalent in both regions, moving away from treating concubines as mere possessions towards empathy and personal connection, highlighting the potential for moral growth within oppressive systems. This narrative reflects broader socio-cultural dynamics, with Zeynel Bey's compassionate approach resonating with Tanzimat writers' ideals of societal reform and enlightenment, particularly evident in his pivotal role in facilitating the marriage of Fatin and Fitnat, which aligns with Ahmet Midhat's thematic intentions of challenging societal norms and advocating for ethical conduct.

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<sup>125</sup> Ahmet Midhat, *Esaret*, 7-8.

<sup>126</sup> Ahmet Midhat, *Esaret*, 16.

<sup>127</sup> Karabulut, "Tanzimat Dönemi Romanlarında Hürriyet ve Esaret İzlekleri," 324.

As Fitnat and Fatin mature under Zeynel's care, a profound emotional connection blossoms between them, unbeknownst to their guardian. Zeynel, growing fond of Fitnat's intellectual curiosity and demeanor, remains unaware of their burgeoning relationship. However, Zeynel harbors his own affection for Fitnat and desires to use his influence over her. Initially oblivious to the bond between Fitnat and Fatin, Zeynel eventually notices their mutual interest by chance. This revelation triggers a profound soul-searching within him, marking a pivotal point in the narrative. Despite his legal ownership of Fitnat, Zeynel grapples with conflicting emotions, torn between his growing love for her and his conscience, which urges him to refrain from exploiting his power or manipulating her affections.

Zeynel ultimately confesses his feelings to Fitnat, but when she does not reciprocate, he claims he was merely testing her to gauge her reaction. Fitnat, viewing Zeynel as her benefactor, asserts that while she owes him her life, her physical freedom remains her own. She says, “Yes, I want to say that your right is limited to my life. In other words, while my personal freedom is in your hands and there's nothing to say about that, my physical freedom is in my own hands, and I have chosen to gift it to Fatin as you have seen and understood.” She makes it clear that Zeynel has no right to harm her, emphasizing her autonomy. Ahmet Tanpınar portrays this inner conflict as central to the narrative, highlighting Zeynel's struggle to prioritize ethical considerations over his personal desires, particularly his growing love for Fitnat.<sup>128</sup>

In a decisive act of compassion, Zeynel Bey resolves to support Fitnat and Fatin's union, facilitating their marriage with his blessing. The next day, wedding preparations are swiftly made, and Zeynel Bey assists the two lovers in their marriage ceremony. However, tragedy strikes as the sound of four gunshots suddenly pierces the air from the bride's room while Zeynel Bey converses elsewhere. Rushing to investigate, they discover Fitnat and Fatin lying lifeless on the floor. Reading the letter left for him, Zeynel Bey struggles to comprehend the tragic truth. Despite

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<sup>128</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*, (İstanbul: YKY, 2006), 417.

never discussing their origins until that day, the siblings unknowingly revealed their shared history during their conversation. Realizing they were siblings, they attribute their dire circumstances to captivity, choosing death to avoid lingering guilt and to explain their decision to Zeynel Bey.

Deeply saddened, Zeynel Bey renounces purchasing slaves of unknown origin, haunted by the memory until his death. The narrative's stark simplicity, accentuated by the abrupt revelation, eschews conventional storytelling tropes for a raw, emotionally charged denouement that accentuates the profound moral quandaries faced by the characters. In the story's conclusion, the author curses the existence of the institution of slavery: "I repented for the sale of slaves again and began to criticize those who sold and bought for separating the mother's lambs from their mothers and causing thousands of similar stories..."<sup>129</sup>

Ahmet Midhat Efendi explores the significance of both mental and physical freedom, emphasizing the captivity through a tragic climax: the suicide of two siblings, sold without knowledge of their shared familial bond, just as they were preparing to marry. Despite Zeynel Bey's efforts to educate and intellectually emancipate the concubine bestowed upon him, he finds himself unable to reconcile her perceived status as a slave, subject to the whims of her owner. The narrative suggests that had Fitnat and Fatin, the two slaves, not been inhibited by fear to even converse openly, the tragic outcome might have been averted.

Furthermore, the narrator stresses the moral condemnation of captivity by depicting the suicides of Fitnat and Fatin, thereby amplifying the emotional and ethical ramifications of such practices. In fact, what Zeynel says at the end of the story encapsulates the message Midhat wants to convey: "The story of arbitrariness ends here. But my sadness and sorrow are not complete with the story. It is obvious that this grief will continue even until death, just as it has continued until now."<sup>130</sup> İsmail Parlatır states that the death of the slaves at the end of the story symbolizes

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<sup>129</sup> Ahmet Midhat, 28.

<sup>130</sup> Ahmet Midhat, 28.

the desire for the death of the institution of slavery.<sup>131</sup> Through this narrative, the author reveals his stance against the institution of slavery and the necessity of rejecting it.<sup>132</sup> Zeynel Bey's profound reaction to the tragedy highlights his committed denunciation of captivity, driven by the harrowing consequences witnessed from the forced separation of families and individuals through slavery.

*ii. Acayib-i Alem (Strange World)<sup>133</sup>*

Ahmet Midhat's novel "Acayib-i Alem," published in 1882, unfolds the journeys and adventures of two companions, Suphi and Hicabi, who are later joined by Miss Haft. As they traverse the landscapes of Western Russia, Siberia, and Northern Europe, the novel, fundamentally a travelogue, relates to a compelling romantic subplot that evolves between Suphi and the Russian woman, Miss Haft.

The narrative begins with Suphi, a curious man of science, who inspires his friend Hicabi to join him on a journey beyond their familiar surroundings in Istanbul. The two friends board a ship bound for Odessa, marking the start of their travels. From Odessa, they continue by train to Balta, where they encounter a Russian princess, Miss Haft. Suphi and Hicabi proceed on their travels accompanied by Miss Haft, and together they explore Moscow and Petersburg with keen interest before venturing further north to Siberia and Scandinavia. The central thread of the novel lies in the blossoming romantic relationship between Suphi and Miss Haft, culminating in their marriage.

Throughout the narrative, Ahmet Midhat provides detailed descriptions and comparisons of landmarks, cultural practices, and historical contexts, reminiscent of 18th and 19th-century travelogues. As Suphi and Hicabi journey through Russia, Midhat vividly introduces schools, palaces, churches, and historical sites, drawing comparisons with similar structures in the

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<sup>131</sup> İsmail Parlatır, *Tanzimat Edebiyatında Kölelik*, 49.

<sup>132</sup> Parlatır, *Tanzimat Edebiyatında Kölelik*, 51.

<sup>133</sup> Ahmet Midhat Efendi, *Acayib-i Alem*, by M. Fatih Andı (Ankara: TDK Yayınları, 2000)

Ottoman Empire. These comparisons expand to include discussions on the harem and slavery, where Midhat presents defenses for the Eastern understanding of the harem, countering Western misconceptions prevalent at the time. Suphi Bey vigorously defends the system against Western perceptions of harems as indulgent and luxurious, emphasizing the practical roles of concubines within Ottoman society. He challenges the romanticized notions depicted in Western literature, questioning how authors could describe harems accurately when even Turks themselves could not access each other's harems. During a conversation with Miss Haft, Suphi defends the institution of concubinage, offering a perspective that highlights its societal roles and counters the prevalent Western misconceptions:

*Princess: What about all those concubines?*

*Suphi: They are not for pleasure and indulgence. They are for the general service of the household. In Europe, concubines perform services akin to those of 'dame d'honneur' and 'femme de chambre' to maids and cooks.*

*Princess: Concubines called Odaluk? (odalique)...*

*Suphi: Yes! If the master's wife dies or becomes sick or old, a concubine will take her place, similar to a married woman. Even the children she bears are legitimate heirs. See, authors writing about this often don't even know their names correctly. If the mistake starts with the names, how far does it go?<sup>134</sup>*

This dialogue illustrates Suphi's attempt to contextualize and defend the practice of concubinage by comparing it to certain European customs while also highlighting misunderstandings and misrepresentations about the institution. He explains that concubines were primarily retained for general household services, comparable to roles held by women in Europe, such as ladies-in-waiting and chambermaids. In Ottoman society, concubines (odalisques) assumed duties within the master's household and could step into the role of a wife if the master became incapacitated or passed away. This transition granted them a status similar to that of a married woman, and any children born to a concubine were considered legitimate heirs.

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<sup>134</sup> Ahmet Midhat, *Acayib-i Âlem*, 91.

Miss Haft emerges as a compelling advocate for dispelling Western misconceptions about the Eastern world, having traveled alongside Suphi Bey and experienced firsthand the stark contrast between reality and Western portrayals in literature and art. The inclusion of a Western protagonist like Miss Haft, aligned with Suphi Bey's perspective as a Turk, serves to enhance the credibility of the narrative. Miss Haft recounts her travels to the Ottoman country, where she witnessed Turks not as a dominant nation but rather as a diverse and complex society. She attributes Western misinterpretations of the East to political motives rather than genuine understanding, highlighting the broader issue of cultural biases influencing perceptions.

In her discussions, Miss Haft draws comparisons between the treatment of slaves in Russia and the conditions in the Ottoman Empire, emphasizing how, despite both being recognized as human, Russian slaves were treated as commodities, subject to sale and ownership by their masters:

*In Russia, slaves are still considered human. However, on a farm, just as crops and land are commodities, slaves are likewise human commodities. They can be sold or bought, not individually, but as families, even twenty or thirty families together. Among them, the luckiest ones receive a portion of what they earn as their own share. Those who are less fortunate make do with whatever their masters give them. (...) The bodies and lives of the slaves belong to their masters, and even if they are killed, it is no more significant than killing a dog that belongs to them. Spiritually, slaves are also subordinate to their masters. A master can marry off male and female slaves as he wishes. Giving a girl to any man he chooses is akin to pairing a mare with a stallion. If the master desires a beautiful girl, he may take her for himself. The girl's parents do not own her to prevent this. Even if a man fancies a married woman, he can take her in the presence of her husband. Isn't the property his own?<sup>135</sup>*

Furthermore, Miss Haft welcomes the state's efforts to foster religious freedom, viewing it as a means to ensure universal happiness rather than political maneuvering. This perspective reflects a deeper exploration of societal values and motivations underlying policy decisions within the narrative. Drawing comparisons between captivity in Russia and the Ottoman

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<sup>135</sup>Ahmet Midhat, *Acayib-i Âlem*, 123.

Empire, the narrator questions the nature of captivity, highlighting the treatment of Arab concubines within Ottoman households:

*Do we have captivity anyway? When Arab concubines taken for household service fall into our hands, they may perhaps be considered as captives until they arrive in our homes. However, after coming to our households, they become obligated to ordinary services for a few years to free themselves from this initial captivity. In other words, they discharge themselves from this obligation of captivity through their regular services, and upon payment of the coinage we give for purchase, they attain freedom according to the measure of our kindness.<sup>136</sup>*

This passage emphasizes that Arab concubines taken into service may initially be regarded as slaves until they are purchased, but their status changes once they enter the household. Although the narrator acknowledges the possibility of mistreatment by some individuals, such occurrences are deemed uncommon. It is asserted that white concubines cannot be considered slaves and are no different from married women in their societal standing.

In the later stages of the story, Suphi and Miss Haft, continuing their journey, develop romantic feelings for each other. They ultimately marry in England, their final destination. Upon their return to İstanbul, they successfully convince Miss Haft's prejudiced aunt in England, who harbors biases against Suphi and Turks in general.

This work represents Ahmet Midhat's response to the abolitionist movement prevalent in the broader world, where he compares Russia's slavery practices with those of the Ottoman Empire. Midhat emphasizes that severe cases of abuse were infrequent in Ottoman society, highlighting the notable autonomy enjoyed by many slaves. He challenges Western misconceptions surrounding harems and concubinage, depicting these practices as essential elements of Ottoman culture. While acknowledging the limitations faced by slaves, Midhat contrasts the Ottoman institution of slavery with the harshness of Russian slavery, arguing

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<sup>136</sup> Ahmet Midhat, *Açıyib-i Âlem*, 124.

that the former humanized slaves and treated them with dignity, thereby presenting avenues for social advancement.

#### **b. Namık Kemal (1840-1888)**

Namık Kemal, known as the “Poet of the Homeland” and “Poet of Liberty,” was born in 1840 in Tekirdağ. Raised under the guardianship of his grandfather, Abdüllâtif Pasha, he traversed various cities across Rumelia and Anatolia during his formative years, immersing himself in the study of Arabic and Persian. By the age of 18, Kemal relocated to İstanbul, where he found employment as a clerk at the prestigious *Bâb-ı Âli* Translation Office.<sup>137</sup>

Namık Kemal pioneered the introduction of concepts such as patriotism, freedom, and nation into Ottoman thought and literature. His incisive writings for the newspaper “Tasvir-i Efkar” garnered attention, but also attracted threats of arrest, prompting him to seek refuge in Paris. There, he aligned himself with the Young Ottomans before relocating to London, where he contributed to the “Muhbir” newspaper and established “Hürriyet.” Upon his return to Istanbul, he faced exile to Gelibolu as a consequence of his provocative articles in the “İbret” newspaper.<sup>138</sup>

Namık Kemal's enduring impact on Turkish literature and politics stems from his steadfast dedication to patriotic values and social reform. His play “Vatan Yahut Silistre,” banned for its strong patriotic themes, led to his exile in Magosa. Throughout his life, he championed “art for society's sake,” employing a clear and accessible language to enlighten the masses.<sup>139</sup> Kemal frequently explores the theme of freedom in his literary works, notably addressing the presence of slavery as an important element in the societal landscape of the

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<sup>137</sup> “Atatürk Ansiklopedisi,” *Namık Kemal (1840-1888)*, 12.05.2024, <https://ataturkansiklopedisi.gov.tr/bilgi/namik-kemal-1840-1888/>

<sup>138</sup> “Atatürk Ansiklopedisi,” *Namık Kemal (1840-1888)*.

<sup>139</sup> “Atatürk Ansiklopedisi,” *Namık Kemal (1840-1888)*.

time. In his novel “İntibah,” he delves into the story of a man ensnared in a misguided romance, demonstrating the difficulties of social life during that era.

*i. İntibah (Awakening)*<sup>140</sup>

Set against the backdrop of early 19th-century İstanbul, this novel delves into the complicated lives of Ali Bey, Mehpeyker, and Dilâşûb, weaving a tapestry of love, betrayal, and tragedy. Ali Bey, a young man of considerable wealth and education, finds himself adrift in the wake of his father's passing. Consumed by grief, he seeks comfort in the tranquil hills of Çamlıca, where he grapples with his inner turmoil. Yet, despite his attempts to find peace, Ali Bey's world is upended when he encounters Mehpeyker, a woman shrouded in mystery and allure.

Unbeknownst to Ali Bey, Mehpeyker is a woman of the night, known to many in İstanbul's shadowy underworld. Ignorant of her profession, Ali Bey is captivated by her beauty and charm, falling deeply in love with her against the backdrop of his mother's concerns and societal expectations. Meanwhile, Fatma Hanım, Ali Bey's devoted mother, watches with growing unease as her son becomes ensnared in Mehpeyker's web. Determined to rescue him from what she perceives as a perilous relationship, Fatma Hanım heeds the advice of Mesut Bey, one of her son's friends. He suggests a drastic solution: “Quickly bring a beautiful concubine into your home that the gentleman will appreciate. Just as an angel is sought to counter the devil, the effects of a negative beauty can only be countered by the positive influence of a pure and innocent beauty.”<sup>141</sup> Thus, she embarks on a mission to find a suitable concubine, enlisting the help of Atıf Bey and his uncle, Mesut Efendi, in a scheme to introduce Dilâşûb, a virtuous and cultured concubine, into their household. Dilâşûb, chosen after exhaustive efforts and significant financial sacrifices on Fatma Hanım's part,

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<sup>140</sup> Namık Kemal, *İntibah* (İstanbul, İş Bankası Yayınları, 2020)

<sup>141</sup> Kemal, *İntibah*, 67.

embodies youth, exceptional beauty, and education, her high price reflecting her perceived value as property in the societal context of the time.

It's worth noting that Ali Bey's household included other concubines who assisted his mother with various chores and served as intermediaries with the outside world. For instance, when Ali Bey's mother sought to contact her son's close friend, Atif Bey, for information, she relied on a concubine who knew his whereabouts. This concubine offered, "If you command, I can locate the mansion."<sup>142</sup> Overwhelmed with gratitude, Ali Bey's mother embraced the concubine and immediately freed her as a reward for her invaluable assistance. Subsequently, they hastily prepared a carriage and, accompanied by the newly freed concubine, headed straight to Atif Bey's mansion. This episode highlights the practice of granting freedom to concubines who rendered exceptional services, demonstrating the power dynamics among women within Ottoman households.

Dilâşûb's ethereal beauty, marked by her silver-like hair and serene demeanor, captivates those around her, including Ali Bey.<sup>143</sup> Initially drawn to her charm, Ali's attention later shifts to Mehpeyker, causing his affection for Dilâşûb to fade. Despite Ali's preoccupation, his mother remains steadfast in her pursuit of Dilâşûb's union with her son. Her unwavering determination speaks volumes about her beliefs:

*What should be done with a concubine? Thank God, you are turning twenty-two. It's time to settle down. It's even overdue. Now, if I find you a girl from a reputable family, you won't even see her face before the wedding. If you end up not liking her after marriage, you'll be tormented for the rest of your life. There will be discord between two ladies in the house, perhaps leading to daughter-in-law conflicts. You'll still face disturbances from time to time. But with a concubine, it's different; if you like her, you can embrace her and mold her as you wish.<sup>144</sup>*

The paragraph effectively highlights the significance of a speech in shedding light on the harsh realities of concubinage and slavery during a specific era. It acknowledges the

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<sup>142</sup> Kemal, *İntibab*, 65.

<sup>143</sup> Kemal, *İntibab*, 68.

<sup>144</sup> Kemal, *İntibab*, 71.

drawbacks of traditional marriage practices prevalent at that time, particularly the challenges faced by young people marrying without prior acquaintance. The speech's emphasis on the benefits of marrying a concubine, which allows individuals to choose partners they genuinely like after seeing them, adds depth to the discussion. Overall, the preference for marrying a concubine, despite their legal status as non-free individuals, reflects deeper societal inclinations and perceptions surrounding marriage and power dynamics. Firstly, it reflects the entrenched patriarchal norms of the time, where men held significant power and control within the household. Marrying a concubine was seen as advantageous because it allowed men greater control over their partners, with the ability to mold them to their preferences. Secondly, it underlines the societal acceptance and normalization of slavery and concubinage as acceptable practices. Despite the acknowledgment of the legal status of concubines as non-free individuals, the preference for marrying them highlights the pervasive acceptance of slavery and the exploitation of individuals for personal gain. Moreover, the emphasis on the convenience and benefits of marrying a concubine over a free woman reflects broader societal attitudes towards marriage and relationships.

Ali Bey's initial hesitance towards Dilâşûb's presence in his life gradually gives way to genuine admiration for her understated grace and intellect. However, as their relationship deepens, Mehpeyker's envy intensifies, prompting her collusion with the affluent merchant Abdullah Efendi to sabotage their bond. Through a web of deceit and manipulation, Mehpeyker orchestrates circumstances that culminate in Ali Bey harshly rejecting Dilâşûb, suspecting her of disloyalty. Devastated by the betrayal, Ali Bey casts Dilâşûb out, unwittingly subjecting her to further torment at the hands of Mehpeyker. Meanwhile, Abdullah, viewing Ali Bey as a rival, concocts a plan to eliminate him, leading to a frantic escape attempt by Ali Bey, aided by a timely warning from Dilâşûb. Tragically, Dilâşûb falls victim to their assailant, mistaken for Ali Bey, leaving him shattered by the consequences of his misplaced trust and the machinations of his adversaries.

In “İntibah,” Namık Kemal offers a poignant portrayal of the institution of slavery through the character of Dilâşûb. As a slave, Dilâşûb embodies the harsh realities of being stripped of autonomy, identity, and agency, condemned to a life of servitude and exploitation. Her presence in the narrative serves as a stark reminder of the dehumanizing effects of slavery, highlighting the pervasive nature of the institution within Ottoman society. Through Dilâşûb's experiences, Namık Kemal prompts readers to confront the brutal legacy of slavery and its enduring implications for both societal structures and individual lives, shedding light on the inherent injustices faced by marginalized figures within the social hierarchy.

### c. Samipaşazade Sezai (1859-1936)

Samipaşazade Sezai, born in 1859 in İstanbul, was a significant figure in the Ottoman literature, particularly known for his novel “Sergüzeşt.” His father, Abdurrahman Sami Pasha, held the significant position of being the first Minister of Education within the Ottoman Empire. Sezai's mother, Gülarayış Hanım, hailed from Circassian origins and had a life circumstance akin to the character Dilber portrayed in his renowned novel “Sergüzeşt.” Sezai's upbringing and heritage undoubtedly influenced his perspective on societal issues, which he later articulated in his literary works.<sup>145</sup>

Sezai embarked on a transformative journey when, at a young age in 1881, he traveled to London where he served as an embassy clerk for an extended duration.<sup>146</sup> This experience exposed him intimately to Western civilization and literature, shaping his literary sensibilities profoundly. His exposure to Western culture provided a contrasting lens through which he viewed Ottoman society upon his return. It was during this period that Sezai began to conceptualize his singular novel “Sergüzeşt,” which exemplifies the transition within Tanzimat literature from romanticism towards realism.

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<sup>145</sup> Türk Edebiyatı İsimleri Sözlüğü, “Samipaşazade Sezai,” 19.05.2024 <https://teis.yesevi.edu.tr/madde-detay/sezai-samipasazade>

<sup>146</sup> Türk Edebiyatı İsimleri Sözlüğü, “Samipaşazade Sezai.”

“Sergüzeşt,” considered Sezai's magnum opus, delves deeply into the pervasive issue of slavery within Ottoman social life, capturing the zeitgeist of the era marked by significant reforms and societal shifts. The novel is a poignant critique of Ottoman society, addressing not only the prevalent institution of slavery but also the broader challenges of westernization and modernization that were reshaping the empire. Through his narrative, Sezai offers an examination of these critical issues, contributing significantly to the discourse on societal transformation during the Tanzimat period. “Sergüzeşt” remains a testament to Sezai's literary prowess and his astute observations of the evolving Ottoman world, making him a seminal figure in Turkish literature.

*i. Sergüzeşt (Adventure)*<sup>147</sup>

Sergüzeşt, unfolds the tragic life of Dilber, a Circassian slave, against the backdrop of the Ottoman social milieu. The novel fictionalizes the profound problems caused by slavery, highlighting its tragic dimensions through the ill-fated love between Celal Bey, an upper-class Westernized man, and Dilber, the Circassian slave.

The story begins with a Russian company's ferry arriving from Batumi at Tophane, setting the stage for an exploration of Circassian representations that shape societal perceptions of slavery. The initial scenes focus on the commodification of Circassian captives, emphasizing their physical attributes like blue eyes, considered valuable “treasures.”<sup>148</sup> The dialogue between the Circassian slave seller and the captor emphasizes the dehumanizing nature of the trade, where voices and identities are marginalized in favor of economic gain. This commodification starkly illustrates how the physical beauty of Circassian women was exploited to justify their enslavement, reducing them to mere objects of trade.

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<sup>147</sup> Samipaşazade Sezai, *Sergüzeşt* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Yayınları, 2020)

<sup>148</sup> Sezai, *Sergüzeşt*, 1.

Dilber, a strikingly beautiful Circassian girl, is sold by the ruthless slave trader Hacı Ömer to Mustafa Efendi for 40 liras. Mustafa Efendi's wife, Atiye, and their Arab servant are harsh and grumpy, making Dilber's life one of complete captivity. She is subjected to relentless cruelty, beatings, and torture, leading her to constantly plan her escape.

Hacı Ömer, portrayed as a figure consumed by the cruelty of human trafficking and likened to a wild tiger, embodies the moral decay inherent in the slave trade. His indifference to human suffering is starkly depicted:

*In the broadest sense, he remained indifferent to the misfortunes that struck a portion of humanity, caring only for his own interests, which included himself. He did not differentiate between the voice of a singer and the cries of a girl, or between the sound of an instrument and the pleas of a beautiful woman. He regarded two things as sacred in his life: the whip that hung on the wall of his room, symbolizing his commercial success, and the solitude of the vulnerable beings who entered his home.<sup>149</sup>*

This chilling description highlights Ömer's complete disregard for the humanity of his captives, reducing them to mere commodities in his pursuit of profit.

Eventually, Dilber attempts to flee but collapses from exhaustion in front of a garden gate. She is discovered by a servant of the house and taken in by a kind old landlord. An old woman in the household heals Dilber and promises to secure permission from her owner for Dilber to stay with them. However, when the old woman approaches Mustafa Efendi's house, Atiye refuses to let Dilber go, viewing it as a matter of honor. Dilber is forcibly returned, deeply affecting her as she faces the same unpleasant conditions again.

When Mustafa Efendi is transferred to Erzurum, he sells Dilber to another slave dealer for 65 liras. This new dealer treats her well, teaching her to play instruments and sing to increase her value. At 15, Dilber was sold to a wealthy and kind customer in Moda, where she found herself in a new household where she was treated as a human being, not a slave.

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<sup>149</sup>Sezai, *Sergüzeşt*, 1.

The household consists of a lady, her husband, and their only son, Celal Bey, who had studied painting in Paris. Celal often uses Dilber as a model for his paintings and develops a romantic interest in her. Initially, Dilber does not respond, but over time, she reciprocates his feelings. Their love blossoms, despite Celal's mother's disapproval. Celal's artistic gaze and his romantic interest in Dilber initially seem to humanize her, but it also reflects a continuation of objectification, albeit in a more socially acceptable form.

Celal's mother, disturbed by their relationship, sells Dilber to a slave dealer while Celal is away. Upon his return, Celal falls ill with grief upon discovering Dilber's absence. The slave dealer sells Dilber to a wealthy Egyptian merchant with a large harem. Dilber faces torture and imprisonment for refusing to be the merchant's concubine. A compassionate eunuch, moved by her plight, plans to help her escape but tragically dies in the attempt. This part of Dilber's journey underlines the extreme vulnerabilities and brutalities faced by female slaves, as well as the rare but poignant acts of solidarity and compassion from others trapped within the same oppressive system.

With her last hope gone, Dilber, overwhelmed by loneliness and hopelessness, throws herself into the river Nile, ending her life. This tragic culmination not only emphasizes the relentless cruelty faced by individuals like Dilber but also serves as a poignant commentary on the devastating effects of societal oppression and exploitation. Her final act of despair illustrates the ultimate cost of a life lived without autonomy, freedom, or hope.

In conclusion, “Sergüzeşt” provides a stark examination of the tragic consequences of slavery within the Ottoman Empire, using Dilber's story to highlight systemic exploitation and dehumanization. The author seeks to illuminate Dilber's profound helplessness, emphasizing that her captivity is not merely an individual plight but a product of societal structures. This sentiment is encapsulated in the poignant quote: “This weak creature,

oppressed by captivity, abandoned by humanity, occasionally caressed by hope, sleeps in the silence of the night.”<sup>150</sup>

Ultimately, “Sergüzeşt” offers a compelling exploration of captivity and its profound impact on individuals and society. Through Dilber's harrowing journey, Sezai delivers a powerful indictment of the inhumanity and moral decay perpetuated by the slave trade, urging readers to confront the systemic exploitation embedded within Ottoman society.

#### d. Nabızade Nazım (1862-1893)

Nabızade Nazım born in İstanbul's Nişantaşı district, he endured personal hardships from an early age, including the loss of his mother and subsequent struggles within his family. Despite these challenges, he embarked on an educational journey that would eventually shape his literary career. He began his studies at neighborhood schools in Beyoğlu and Tophane, where he developed an early passion for literature. This initial exposure laid the groundwork for his exploration of poetic expression and literary experimentation. His formal education culminated in military training at *Mühendishane-i Berr-i Hümayun İdadisi*, where he graduated as a second lieutenant before pursuing further studies at the Military Academy.<sup>151</sup>

Nabızade Nazım's literary oeuvre spans poetry, stories, novels, and literary criticism, each reflecting his evolving worldview and intellectual pursuits. Rejecting rigid poetic conventions, he championed the concept of “fennî şiir” (scientific poetry), emphasizing the importance of intellectual engagement and emotional resonance in poetic composition.<sup>152</sup>

His foray into prose marked a significant departure from conventional Ottoman storytelling. In novels such as “Zehra,” he delved into complicated character studies, exploring the psychological depths of his protagonists with a realism and touch

<sup>150</sup> Sezai, *Sergüzeşt*, 18.

<sup>151</sup> Türk Edebiyatı İsimler Sözlüğü, “Nabızade Nazım,” 11.05.2024, <https://teis.yesevi.edu.tr/madde-detay/nabizade-nazim>

<sup>152</sup> Türk Edebiyatı İsimler Sözlüğü, “Nabızade Nazım,”

unprecedented in Turkish literature of his time. Through narratives and vivid depictions of social realities, he critiqued prevalent societal issues, challenging romanticized portrayals of love and marriage.<sup>153</sup>

*i. Zehra*<sup>154</sup>

Münire Hanım enters wedlock with Kadir Bey, a distant family member, and together they welcome a son named Suphi into the world. From an early age, Suphi's father takes great care in his education, ensuring he outpaces his peers academically. As Suphi matures into a courteous and striking young man, his father orchestrates an opportunity for him to work alongside Şevket Efendi, a prosperous and industrious businessman known for his astute judgment and accumulation of wealth through diligence.

Şevket Efendi, a concerned father, confides in Suphi about his daughter Zehra's lifelong struggle with jealousy, a trait that has troubled her since childhood. Despite never having visited Şevket Efendi's home before, Suphi finds himself captivated by Zehra during a visit one Friday for work. Recognizing Suphi's admiration, Şevket Efendi takes the initiative to arrange their marriage. Settling into a mansion in Libada, the newlyweds enjoy a blissful and tranquil first year together, free from the shadows of Zehra's jealousy.

To help with household duties, Suphi's mother Münire Hanım buys a slave girl named Sırrıcmal, who is beautiful and virtuous. As the author describes:

*Sırrıcmal was a timsâl-i cemâl (symbol of beauty). She belonged to the most famous branch of the Caucasian race known for beauty and grace. She had a slender waist, broad chest, wide shoulders, long neck, oval face, black eyebrows, eyelashes, and hair. Her skin was pink and white, her hands and feet were small, and her demeanor was charming. She was a delicate beauty.*<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Türk Edebiyatı İsimler Sözlüğü, "Nabızade Nazım,"

<sup>154</sup> Nabizâde Nâzım, *Zehra* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 2010)

<sup>155</sup> Nâzım, *Zehra*, 37.

Sırrıcemal's beauty intensifies Zehra's jealousy. From the moment Zehra sees Sırrıcemal, she becomes increasingly suspicious and controlling, which strains their marriage. Suphi is aware of Zehra's jealousy and tries to please her, but her relentless jealousy becomes unbearable.

In this situation, the author highlights Sırrıcemal's moral character: "For days, she would find ways and excuses to avoid being seen by either Zehra or Suphi."<sup>156</sup> Despite being as beautiful and well-mannered as Zehra, and perhaps morally superior, she still considered herself a devoted servant to her mistress and a humble servant to her master."<sup>157</sup> Throughout the story, Sırrıcemal is frequently compared to Zehra; while the author emphasizes Zehra's jealousy and extreme behavior towards Sırrıcemal, he points out Sırrıcemal's humility and sadness. Zehra's desire to control Sırrıcemal's movements contrasts sharply with Sırrıcemal's subdued demeanor and noble character. Suphi's affection for Sırrıcemal grows. He pities her because of the way Zehra treats him. Sırrıcemal harbors feelings for Suphi, and their love blossoms. While the author describes this mutually growing love, he also depicts the conflicts that develop between Zehra and Sırrıcemal. In doing so, he portrays the relationship between the two women not as one between a free woman and a slave girl, but as equals. Through this approach, the author humanizes Sırrıcemal. Eventually, Sırrıcemal becomes pregnant. Her romantic relationship with the master of the house had given her the right to become the lady of the house. Feeling herself to be the second lady of the house, Sırrıcemal's thoughts and attitudes change, believing that the presence of the unborn child would grant her a stronger position.

As tensions escalate at home, Suphi, unable to endure the discord any longer, moves out with Sırrıcemal, effectively separating from Zehra. "As Suphi's love for Sırrıcemal increased, Sırrıcemal's efforts to keep Suphi grew more intense each day, even if it meant tearing herself

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<sup>156</sup> Nâzım, *Zehra*, 39

<sup>157</sup> Nâzım, *Zehra*, 31.

apart.”<sup>158</sup> After moving to a new house, Sırrıcemal, not fully trusting Suphi, demands that he divorce Zehra, and he complies. Zehra, consumed by a desire for revenge, hires Habibe Molla to find Suphi and Sırrıcemal's new residence. She plans to use another woman, Ürani, to seduce Suphi away from Sırrıcemal. Ürani, an alluring and unscrupulous woman, successfully captivates Suphi at a party, causing him to abandon Sırrıcemal.

Desperate and destitute, Sırrıcemal eventually commits suicide. Suphi's relationship with Ürani leads to his financial ruin, as he neglects his business, which his assistant Muhsin takes over. Muhsin marries Zehra, and Suphi becomes penniless and homeless. He joins a group of firefighters, leading a life of debauchery until they also expel him. Blaming Ürani for his downfall, Suphi murders her and her companion before being arrested and exiled to Tripoli. Here, the author opens a separate parenthesis for Sırrıcemal, explaining how Suphi ruined his life:

*Why did he sacrifice Sırrıcemal, the helpless Sırrıcemal? Poor Sırrıcemal, who knows how much torment she was going through now. Who knows how much she was cursing herself and what kind of hope she was clinging to... Suphi was not yet aware of Sırrıcemal's tragic fate. He had sacrificed Zehra for Sırrıcemal, but for whom did he sacrifice Sırrıcemal? For a filthy (pis bir karı) woman!*<sup>159</sup>

Zehra still hopes for Suphi's return, but he is on his way to Tripoli. One day, she witnesses a crowd gathered around the dead body of an elderly woman, who turns out to be Münire Hanım. Overwhelmed by grief and illness, Zehra eventually succumbs to her sorrows and passes away.

This novel, centered on the theme of jealousy, offers a sad portrayal of the life of a female slave during that period. Nazım empathizes with the tragic story of Sırrıcemal, highlighting the challenges she faces as a slave. The author envisions emancipation while revealing the tragic life of a slave woman. The novel vividly depicts the social dynamics of the time, particularly the status and influence a slave could attain through marriage to their masters.

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<sup>158</sup> Nâzım, *Zehra*, 50.

<sup>159</sup> Nâzım, *Zehra*, 102.

Marriage served as a significant avenue for advancement within the household hierarchy, enabling concubines like Sırrıcemal to rise to positions of prominence. However, Sırrıcemal's tragic demise at the end of the novel serves as a condemnation of the institution of slavery, poignantly reminding readers of the pervasive injustices inherent in the system.

### 3. A Literary Examination of the Novels

Tanzimat literature, shaped by the socio-political landscape of its era, reflects themes deeply intertwined with society rather than distant concepts. Central themes such as freedom, captivity, and slavery permeate various genres introduced during this transformative period. With abolitionist movements gaining momentum globally and within the Ottoman Empire, these themes gained even greater significance. Although the slave trade came to be as an “issue” during this period, preventing concubines and slaves from being bought and sold, it did not change their place in life. Tanpınar notes that the richness of the subject of slavery and concubinage, present at the beginning of Turkish written narrative history, is rooted in oral tradition. He adds, “Our first storytellers would not have missed such a rich and poignant subject with such local and deep-rooted possibilities. Moreover, it existed in real life; the first and hasty experiments were carried out with them.”<sup>160</sup>

Tanzimat literature, influenced by Western literary movements, particularly grappled with the notion of captivity and slavery, often blending romantic and melancholic sentiments with social critique. Writers of the time, deeply impacted by their environment and personal experiences, crafted cohesive explorations of these crucial themes within their works. Among these, slavery emerges as a particularly poignant motif, as evidenced by the incorporation of slave characters and motifs of captivity by

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<sup>160</sup> Tanpınar, *XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi*, 295.

prominent figures such as Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Namık Kemal, Samipaşazade Sezai, and Nabızade Nazım.

In examining the characters in selected novels, the prominence of enslaved women stands out, becoming central to the narrative. Alongside “Acayibi Alem,” notable enslaved characters include Fitnat from “Esaret,” Dilaşub from “İntibah,” Dilber from “Sergüzeşt,” and Sırrıcemal from “Zehra.” These characters are not merely passive figures; they possess agency, exemplified by Zehra. Throughout the novels, enslaved individuals emerge as fully developed personalities with their own aspirations. The authors emphasize their education, talent, and beauty, underscoring their humanity. By dignifying these characters, the authors illuminate their resilience, granting them a voice and significance within the narrative. It's intriguing that these characters are often portrayed as Muslims rather than adherents of Christianity, with some originating from Caucasian backgrounds, as seen in “Sergüzeşt.” This portrayal reflects the authors' personal experiences and heritage, with Ahmet Midhat Efendi and Samipaşazade Sezai, both having Caucasian ancestry, drawing from their own backgrounds in crafting these narratives.

The portrayal of free women takes center stage in various literary works. Elevating enslaved characters to primary roles highlights a status traditionally beyond the reach of conventional 'slaves.' By presenting enslaved individuals without resorting to stereotypes, authors break free from conventional portrayals. This inversion of expectations challenges societal norms surrounding the roles of slaves within familial and social structures. For instance, in narratives where enslaved characters occupy prominent positions, such as “İntibah” featuring Mahpeyker and “Zehra” with Zehra, this repositioning serves to humanize enslaved individuals and prompt readers to reevaluate entrenched beliefs about slavery's portrayal in literature.

Moreover, Antagonist figures like Hacı Ömer in “Sergüzeşt” and the malevolent slave trader and his wife, as exemplified by Atiye, play significant roles. These 'villainous' characters are portrayed in opposition to enslaved women, driving the narrative forward and highlighting the struggles faced by the enslaved. Despite these adversities, the authors sympathize with the plight of the enslaved, advocating for their fair treatment and dignity. The depiction of slavery is starkly rendered through harrowing events, serving as a dramatic indictment of the institution itself.

The novel “Zehra” stands out for its overt expression of the authors' stance against the hardships endured by slaves. However, there's a notable departure from the conventional portrayal of enslaved women as entirely innocent. In “Zehra,” the character Sırrıcmal is depicted in a somewhat flirtatious manner, deviating from the typical portrayal. For instance, Sırrıcmal, following her pregnancy, asserts herself as the lady of the house and manipulates her relationship with Suphi to her advantage. Remarkably, the author seems to normalize such behavior, overlooking Zehra's previous status as a slave, thus humanizing her by supporting her actions. Despite Zehra's actions being driven by self-interest, the author appears to rationalize some of her questionable deeds as those of a typical person.

The narrative often portrays the main characters, typically male, as deeply infatuated and smitten with the enslaved female characters. These male figures openly express their affection for enslaved women, and their longing to be with individuals of such status recurs throughout the stories “Esaret,” “İntibah,” “Sergüzeşt,” and “Zehra.” In this context, male characters captivated by the beauty of the concubines love them unconditionally, overlooking their past as slaves.

When delving into the themes within these works, it's clear that love, jealousy, and captivity are central, often overshadowing direct discussions of slavery and freedom. Writers critique the institution of slavery, a pervasive aspect of society, through themes

such as jealousy and love, evoking a melancholic atmosphere and concluding their stories with tragic endings. In doing so, they evoke empathy from readers, prompting them to empathize with the plight of the characters and reflect on the injustices portrayed. Upon examining the plotlines, it's evident that enslaved characters endure severe mistreatment, underscoring the authors' call for humane treatment and their alignment with the struggles faced by the enslaved. This portrayal serves to emphasize the authors' advocacy for fair treatment of slaves, showcasing their empathy and support for those subjected to oppression.

The selected novels primarily depict everyday life narratives, where slave characters are integrated into the storyline as a reflection of the prevalent institution of slavery during that era. However, “Acayib-i Alem” stands apart from these narratives due to its distinct approach. In this work, the author highlights a crucial aspect that distinguishes Ottoman society from the West: the value accorded to individuals, including concubines. The author, Ahmet Midhat Efendi contends that within Ottoman households, concubines were regarded as integral members, a stark contrast to the dehumanizing treatment of slaves in Russia. Ahmet Midhat's comparative analysis of Eastern and Western slavery in “Acayib-i Alem” represents the West's sole response to Eastern slavery critiques.

The absence of similar responses from other writers, along with Ahmet Midhat's acknowledgment and acceptance of the concept of slavery, indicates a lack of consensus among writers regarding the abolitionist movement. While they do critique the institution of slavery and the mistreatment of enslaved individuals, they generally do not actively engage with abolitionist discourse, except for Ahmet Midhat Efendi.

However, the selection of domestic slavery as the predominant type of slavery depicted in their books, and the portrayal of harems in works like “Acayibi Alem,” suggests a defensive stance among the authors. This defensive stance becomes apparent

as they avoid discussing other forms of slavery prevalent in the empire. It can be interpreted that the authors are attempting to show the West that while they critique slavery, they view domestic slavery as the only acceptable form, deserving of humane treatment and integration into the household, as depicted in their novels.

In essence, while the authors critique slavery, they simultaneously convey a message that domestic slavery, which they present as tragic and deserving of empathy, is the only form of slavery in the empire. Through this stance, the authors aim to defend the Ottoman Empire against the perception of being a slave society akin to Europe, instead positioning it as a society with slaves.

## CONCLUSION

The Tanzimat period stands as a transformative era in Ottoman history, marked by efforts towards modernization and reform. Although the concept of equality that emerged during this period applied primarily to non-Muslim subjects, the legal changes did not extend to slaves. Within the legal framework of the time, the status of slaves remained ambiguous and excluded. However, the depiction of slaves varied in writers' perception. Tanzimat writers, including notable figures such as Ahmet Midhat Efendi, Namık Kemal, Samipaşazade Sezai and Nabızade Nazım, played a significant role in shaping the literary landscape of the time and engaging with slavery and abolitionist discourse and Western perceptions of slavery. Through their literary works, these writers employed a dual strategy in addressing slavery. Internally, they woven themes of captivity and slavery into their narratives, often imbuing them with romantic and melancholic tones to critique the institution and advocate for humane treatment. Externally, only Ahmet Midhat Efendi, sought to portray Ottoman society positively to Western audiences, navigating the densities of external perceptions and pressures. Through their literary works, Tanzimat writers engaged critically with the issue of slavery, advocating consistently for humane treatment. While each writer brought a similar perspective to the topic, their collective stance converged on the call for compassion and improved conditions for slaves. Moreover, by weaving themes of love, jealousy, and captivity into their narratives, these writers indirectly critiqued slavery, evoking empathy and effectively advocating for social justice.

This study is pivotal for scrutinizing the discourse articulated by Tanzimat writers in response to abolitionism and slavery through their literary works. Future research could profitably explore the perceptions of slavery across different societal strata during the Tanzimat period, illuminating varied attitudes of the time. Moreover, conducting comparative analyses with literature from diverse regions and cultures holds promise for enriching our comprehension of the global discourse surrounding this enduring societal concern, thereby fostering a more

nuanced understanding of the inherent in slavery within the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century.

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