

**MUHAJIR POLITICS OF THE HAMIDIAN ERA:
THE CASE OF CHECHENS
IN RA'S AL-'AYN**

By

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Submitted to

Central European University - Private University

Department of History

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative
History

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Vienna, Austria

2024

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Abstract

This thesis examines the migration policies of the Hamidian era (1876-1909), with a central focus on the Chechen refugee settlements of Ra's al-'Ayn district. By concentrating on this region, this thesis uncovers the strategic intent of Ottoman authorities to implement imperial policies through refugee settlements strategically established in the peripheries. However, not every refugee settlement served the imperial political purposes as the Ottoman Empire had envisioned. The Ottoman state established the Chechen refugee settlements of Ra's al-'Ayn to pursue its imperial objectives in the eastern deserts against the semi-independent tribes dominating the region. The Chechens, unfortunately, were unable to thrive within this region due to adverse conditions. They endured droughts, locust invasions, malaria, and cholera, which resulted in an inability to maintain an agrarian community in the district. In this thesis, I argue that the primary factors that led to the challenges Chechen refugees encountered were the inadequate assessment of land suitability for settlement and insufficient government support, which eventually led them to resort to banditry in Ra's al-'Ayn.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe my deepest gratitude to my advisor Nadia Al-Bagdadi, for her patience, insightful guidance and support. Her detailed and constructive feedbacks improved the quality of this thesis. Most importantly, her encouragement and continuous support throughout the course of my thesis were invaluable. I am also grateful to my second reader Brett Wilson for his enlightening conversations that enhanced my understanding of the subject.

I am also indebted to my friends for their mental and emotional support. Their understanding and solidarity were source of strength, helping me to overcome the challenges of this thesis.

Above all, I am thankful to my partner, Khaled, whose love and support have been my guiding light during these cruel times.

I would like to dedicate this work to all those displaced, your resilience in the face of adversity is a great inspiration.

Note on Transliteration

In this thesis, I have employed the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* system for Arabic transliteration, using diacritics specifically for 'ayn and hamza and for Ottoman Turkish transliterations, I have used modern Turkish orthography.

All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

List of Figures

Figure 1: The administrative map of Zor Province in 1891.....	36
Figure 2: Chechens with members of Milli Tribe	71
Figure 3: Mounted Chechens of Safh village, Ra's al-'Ayn, 1911.....	74
Figure 4: Schools of Urfa and Zor Provinces, 1914.....	78
Figure 5: The only Rüşdiye of Ra's al-'Ayn district located in Safh village with its Chechen students, 1911.	79

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
List of Figures	v
Introduction	1
Literature Review	4
Methodology and Sources	8
Thesis Outline	12
1 Ottoman Migration Policies	13
1.1 Migration Policies until the Hamidian Era (1800-1876)	14
1.1.1 Mass Migration from Caucasia	14
1.1.2 Earlier Policies of Migration	17
1.2 Migration Policies of the Hamidian Era (1876-1909)	22
2 Ottoman Rule in Ra's al-'Ayn District (1800-1909): Tribes, Reforms and Settlements	30
2.1 Political, Geographic and Demographic Characteristics of the Region	31
2.1.1 Demography of the Region	37
2.2 Centralization Efforts of the Ottoman Empire in Kurdistan	43
2.2.1 Implementation of Tanzimat Reforms in Kurdistan	45
2.3 Chechen Settlements in Ra's al-'Ayn	51
3 Life in the Desert: Refugees, Tribes and Empire	58
3.1 First Decades of Refugee Settlements in Ra's al-'Ayn	58
3.1.1 Chechen Refugee Settlements in the Hamidian Era (1876-1909)	62
3.2 Refugees to Bandits: Adapting the Local Practices	66
3.3 End of a Dream: Ra's al-'Ayn in the Hamidian Era and Beyond	75
Conclusion	83
BIBLIOGRAPHY	88

Introduction

Although many refugee households (*muhacirin haneleri*) were settled in Ra's al-'Ayn and Khabur areas to develop the desert side (*çölün ma'muriyeti*), the implementation of such a grand idea and bold initiative (*fikir-i 'azim ve emr-i cesîm*) would take a long time. From the beginning, the Refugee Commission (*Muhacirin İdaresi*) faced difficulties achieving harmony and agreement between refugees and local tribes.¹

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Ottoman lands became the primary destination for large refugee influxes. In times of conflicts with Russia and territorial losses in the Balkans, refugees arrived en masse, while in the times of stability, migration continued with smaller groups.² The mass migration of the Caucasian communities occurred after Russia defeated Sheikh Shamil, leader of North Caucasian resistance, in 1859. As Russia captured the Caucasus, a significant number of Chechens arrived in Ottoman lands. The Ottoman Empire, with its strategic governance, instrumentalized these refugees to achieve specific political endeavours and settled them in a remote region known as Ra's al-'Ayn. However, as the above statement from Diyarbekir journal illustrates, implementing central policies through refugee groups proved more challenging for the Ottoman government than initially anticipated.

The Ottoman administration, welcomed millions of refugees through liberal policies in migration management, particularly until the Hamidian period. The primary

¹ Diyarbekir Gazetesi, November 4 1869, no. 14, 2.

² Kemal Karpat, "Ottoman Immigration Policies and Settlement in Palestine," in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 790-792.

aim was to achieve multiple political objectives through instrumentalizing the refugee population. These policies included populating the lands deemed vacant by the government and providing manpower for the military.³ By adopting these strategies, the Ottoman government sought to address the issues prevalent throughout the empire. In this century, one of the main challenges was to extend central authority over the regions under the influence of nomadic tribes, particularly the eastern provinces and Arab lands. Their pasture lands were populated with refugee settlements to encourage sedentary lifestyle for nomads. The creation of Chechen refugee settlements in the Ra's al-'Ayn district, located in the peripheries of the eastern deserts, was a part of this strategy against the Kurdish and Bedouin tribes of the region. Although the district bordered the desert, the presence of the Khabur Spring, a branch of the Euphrates River, formed fertile lands suitable for cultivation. In addition to natural resources, the state attributed great potential to this region regarding the ancient civilizations that thrived in the same area.

In this thesis, I will delve into the Chechen refugee settlements of Ra's al-'Ayn region within the framework of the Hamidian Era (1876-1909) migration policies. The following pivotal questions form the basis of this inquiry: What objectives did the Ottoman state pursue in settling the Chechen refugees in Ra's al-'Ayn region? Did these objectives display continuity or divergence between the Azizian and Hamidian eras? How did these policies influence the Chechen settlements? What were the profound impacts of Chechen settlements on the region? Finally, did these impacts align with the objectives of the Ottoman Empire? With these questions guiding my

³ Ibid., 784-787; Arsen Avagyan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Kemalist Türkiye'nin Devlet-İktidar Sisteminde Çerkesler*, (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2004), 32.

analysis, I argue that Chechen refugees were unable to prosper in the Ra's al-'Ayn region as an agrarian community due to inadequate assessment of land suitability for settlement, insufficient economic and political support both in the Azizian and Hamidan eras. Despite its fertile lands, this region was prone to adverse conditions like malaria, cholera, droughts and locust invasions. For the Chechen refugee families, these problems emerged from the very first years, and their situation deteriorated further with the lack of economic and political support from the government. As a result, many refugees either relocated to different provinces or returned to Russia. A decade later, during the Hamidian era, the problems in the region persisted. However, rather than addressing the issues, the state adopted a strategy of relocating the refugees from Ra's al-'Ayn. The policy of depopulation of the district led to the isolation of remaining refugee groups without any economic or political support, and they sought new strategies to sustain their existence. Consequently, Chechens adapted to regional practices through alliances and networks they formed with local powers, which turned Ra's al-'Ayn into a hub of banditry activities. At the end of the century, the state sought to utilize refugees for strategic purposes across the empire. However, in Ra's al-'Ayn district, the policies of creating loyal subjects from Chechen refugees was not resulted as anticipated. Instead, Chechens transitioned into a group perceived as a threat and ultimately challenged the state's authority.

Literature Review

Literature on the Ottoman migration history can be analyzed in several predominant currents. Firstly, there are comprehensive studies focus on the migration in its entirety.⁴ Although this literature focuses mainly on Muslim refugees, it homogenizes the refugee groups displaced from various regions. This body of literature traces the last century of the empire through the lens of migration policies of the Ottoman Empire. Whereas, monographs were mainly prepared by concentrating on a specific refugee group. Most of these monographs are descriptive and lacking comprehensive examination of the migration processes, settlements or governance, specifically conducting narrow analysis without contextualizing the migration within the broader political frameworks of the era.⁵ However, the monographs of Habiçoğlu and Aydemir form a basis for migration studies with their rich and detailed demographic statistics. One prominent issue with this body of literature is its stereotypical description of refugees as being the sole victims of great empires.⁶ The Muslim refugees, in particular, are solely portrayed as being the victims of Russian expansionist policies, exploited further by the Ottoman Empire, and their agency is overlooked in the migration processes.⁷ Authors from migrant backgrounds, like Nihat Berzeg, often depict Caucasian groups as passive victims of

⁴ Kemal Karpat produced several prominent works concerning the migration and demographics of Late Ottoman Empire; *The Status of The Muslim under European Rule: The Eviction and Settlement of the Çerkes, in Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler*, (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2017); *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics*, (Univ of Wisconsin, 1985); Nedim İpek, *İmparatorluktan Ulus Devlete Göçler*, (Trabzon: Serander Yayınları, 2006); Fuat Dündar, *Hicret, Din ü Devlet: Osmanlı Göç Politikası (1856-1908)*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2021); Abdullah Saydam, *Kırım ve Kafkas Göçleri: 1856-1876*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1997).

⁵ Bedri Habiçoğlu, *Kafkasya'dan Anadolu'ya Göçler*, (İstanbul, 1993).

⁶ İzzet Aydemir, *Göç: Kuzey Kafkaslıların Göç Tarihi*, (Ankara, 1988); Celal Sarıçam; *Ürdün Çerkesleri: Ortadoğu'da Çerkes Azınlık ve Ulus-Devletlerle Olan İlişkileri*, (İstanbul: Şamil Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı, 1998).

⁷ Nihat Berzeg, *Gerçek Tarihi ve Politik Nedenleriyle Çerkes Sürgünü*, (Ankara, 1996).

imperial powers. Berzeg, for instance, highlights how the Russian and Ottoman empires actively collaborated to displace Caucasian communities by the pre-established agreements. However, his focus on the harsh displacement experiences overlooks the active role of these refugees in the process. He neglects to mention the Caucasian groups that remained in the Russian Empire, or those who found the settlements in Ottoman lands unsatisfactory and returned to Russia, or the large-scale repatriations that would occur in the subsequent decades.

In the last decades Ottoman migration studies have gained a notably interdisciplinary nature and begun to address Ottoman migration movements through economic and environmental approaches.⁸ Within this scholarly discourse, refugees are no longer exclusively studied as an isolated group; instead, they are examined concurrently with regional groups like nomads.⁹ One of the prominent characteristics of this literature is its portrayal of refugees as active agents of society. Accordingly, Blumi in his recent work, *Ottoman Refugees*, examines the late and post-Ottoman periods through capitalism and migration. For Blumi, the definition of refugee is relatively broad: refugees fleeing wars or persecution, merchants, missionaries, and individuals in transit are labelled refugees. The author mainly underlines refugees' active roles within their spheres. These refugees often acted on their self-interests, formed collective initiatives, and influenced the states or financial groups to create policies aligned with their presence. Building on this approach, some authors emphasize the refugee alliances and conflicts with nomads, their contributions to the

⁸ Isa Blumi, *Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Chris Gratien, *The Unsettled Plain: An Environmental History of the Late Ottoman Frontier*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2022).

⁹ Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

state economy, and their impact on changing property relations.¹⁰ Troyansky's recent book *Empire of Refugees* represents this new approach to migration history. In his book, the author focuses on refugee settlements in three distinct regions: the Balkans, Anatolia, and the Levant. Specifically, the author focuses on the Circassian refugees and forwards several arguments concerning Ottoman migration policies and their implementation in these regions. Troyansky initially argues that the Ottoman state created a nonwestern and nonsecular refugee regime through The Ottoman Refugee Commission (*Muhacirin Komisyonu*), a significant institution established to manage the influx of refugees. He emphasizes the commission's agency in transforming Ottoman society, as it played a crucial role in the resettlement and integration of the refugees. Additionally, he argues that while the refugee settlements facilitated the disintegration in the Balkans, they consolidated the Ottoman power in Anatolia and Levant. These different outcomes were based on the various policies enforced on the refugee settlements. While Balkan settlements neither received financial nor political support, this led to banditry activities, which resulted in the Bulgarian uprisings; settlements of Anatolia supported politically against the nomads and in the Levant, refugees were both assisted through political and financial means thanks to the Hejaz Railway, and they prospered in the region. Troyansky further investigates refugees' responses to these policies through their economic activities, petitioning practices and trans-imperial movements.

¹⁰ Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2024).

Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire's institutional development, which followed the migration movements, has also received attention in recent scholarship.¹¹ Building on this progression in the literature, other scholars have integrated this strategy with social engineering and internal colonization models. This view argues that the Ottoman Empire reflected its fear of European intervention by enacting its own colonization project in Anatolia and Arab lands. The author further supports the argument by emphasizing the empty land policy and claims that this policy was established to facilitate the physical expulsion of local populations and the internal colonization of these regions with refugee settlements.¹² Additionally, according to this new perspective, the Russian and Ottoman institutional response to these demographic shifts impacted the policies of subsequent periods. Similar strategies of mass mobilization of specific groups, particularly forced migrations, built on the previous political strategies.¹³ The use of internal colonization narratives has resulted in an apparent shift in the focus of contemporary works on the Ottoman peripheries. This new perspective examines the urbanization of refugee settlements in frontier areas with socio-economic and political approaches.¹⁴

Studies on the Chechen settlements of Ra's al-'Ayn region, or more generally on the refugee settlements of eastern areas, predominantly appear as brief entries within works addressing Ottoman migrations or as scholarly articles examining

¹¹ David Cuthell, "The Muhacirin Komisyonu: An agent in the transformation of Ottoman Anatolia, 1860–66", Thesis, Columbia University, New York, 2005; Erdal Taşbaşı, *Halifenin Gölgesine Sığınanlar Göçler ve Muhacirin-i İslamiye Komisyonu*, (Berikan Yayınevi, 2017).

¹² Ella Fratantuono, "Producing Ottomans: Internal Colonization and Social Engineering in Ottoman Immigrant Settlement," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2019.

¹³ Nesim Şeker, "Forced Population Movements in The Ottoman Empire and The Early Turkish Republic: An Attempt at Reassessment Through Demographic Engineering", *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 2013.

¹⁴ Ulrike Freitag et al. *The City in the Ottoman Empire: Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2010); Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, "Circassian refugees and the making of Amman, 1878–1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2017.

singular facets of the settlements.¹⁵ This thesis focuses on the Chechen groups settled in the peripheries of remote areas and investigates the impact of these groups on the locality. This study follows the narrative portraying immigrants as active agents in this context. While focusing on the instrumentalization of Chechen refugees by the state, this research built upon this inquiry and introduces the refugee responses to central policies. In accordance with the agency approach, the primary focus will be given to the interactions of the refugees with the state and local forces. Eventually, the roles refugees dynamically assume in parallel with the migration policies will be examined through the Azizian and Hamidian eras.

Methodology and Sources

This thesis is structured in two layers of analysis, with the first layer focusing on the profound impact of state policies regarding refugee communities and the second layer examining these communities' responses to these central strategies. For the first layer, the thesis delves into the significance of Ottoman policies implemented in the region, which will be analyzed based on frontier expansion strategies. Derived from Eugene Rogan's arguments, the eastern region of the empire is regarded as a "zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies."¹⁶ Similar to this definition, the Ottoman government notably differentiated itself from the nomadic tribes¹⁷, particularly after the Tanzimat reforms, and aimed to

¹⁵ Caner Yelbaşı, From 'brothers in religion' to 'bandits': Chechens in Mardin in the late Ottoman Period, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 58:4, 2021.; Hakan Asan, "Devlet, Aşiret ve Eşkiya Bağlamında Osmanlı Muhacir İskân Siyaseti (1860-1914)," *Göç Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no.3, 2016.

¹⁶ Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 6.

¹⁷ Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism", *The American Historical Review*, Volume 107, Issue 3, 2002; Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Apr., 2003, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2003.

recapture the desert region by settling the tribes or pushing them further into the desert. This "opening of the frontier" politics evolved from coercion to political participation and, finally, social inclusion of tribal communities into the Ottoman system.¹⁸ Parallel with this strategy, the state attributed crucial roles to refugees in implementing these policies. In this section, contrary to the belief that the Ottoman Empire lacked a general settlement policy, I assert that it strategically relocated refugees to advance its political aims, at least in specific regions. Concerning the second part, influenced by the Troyansky¹⁹, I will closely examine the policies implemented by the Ottoman state and will try to assess the impact of these objectives on the transformation of refugee settlements. Despite the difficulties on representation of refugee agency, the thesis strongly emphasizes the pivotal role of political changes in shaping the roles and behaviours of refugees. It highlights how refugees negotiated their roles as a response to various policies and adapted to new circumstances of their lives even if it was against the government's policy. The thesis also provides a detailed examination of their interactions with the state and the local tribes, in view of the primary sources.

This thesis analyzes various primary sources to understand state policies on refugee settlements. State reports, either in port cities receiving refugees or in final destination regions, are mainly produced by provincial officials and, in some cases, by migration officers. This study heavily relies on these reports originated from the Ottoman archives, which detail various aspects of refugee settlements. In addition to archival sources, an official journal published by the provincial governor is consulted

¹⁸ Ibid., 9-15.

¹⁹ Troyansky, 6-7.

to demonstrate the official perspectives and directives on the region, local communities and refugee settlements. Since information on this remote region is scarce in secondary literature, provincial yearbooks (*salnames*) were the principal references to obtain information on the Ra's al-'Ayn district. Provincial yearbooks are crucial sources containing information on various subjects like geography, administrative divisions, population distribution, schools and structures of provinces. These yearbooks also provide statistics on each region's economic and commercial situation. In this respect, yearbooks are invaluable sources to examine a given region's history and observe the transformations in the district over decades. Through provincial and educational yearbooks, this thesis examines the changes the Ra's al-'Ayn district has undergone in four decades. Furthermore, travel accounts of foreign diplomats who visited the area for various intents were also consulted. These accounts constituted profound benefits in supplementing the areas where the Ottoman archive is incomplete, like the daily practices of Chechens. Lastly, several maps and photos are included in the thesis as evidence to illustrate the arguments and support the discussions made throughout the thesis.

The “muhajir” term is crucial for comprehending the Ottoman perspective on refugees. This attribution undoubtedly had strong religious connotations. As stated in *Kamus-i Türki*, a prominent dictionary of the period published in 1889, a muhajir (*muhacir*) is a person who settles in another country with his family. The dictionary entry continues by noting the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions in the name of religion. Şemseddin Sami, provides several examples, such as the muhajirs of Dobruja, Crimea, and Bosnia.²⁰ While there is a similar

²⁰ Şemseddin Sami, “مهاجر (muhajir)” *Kamus-ı Türki*, (Dersaadet: İkdam Matbaası, 1889), 1435.

definition in the Hijra (*hicret*) entry from which the word muhajir is derived, this time, the migration of Circassians to the Ottoman lands is noted as an exemplary sentence.²¹ As the dictionary entries depict, these expressions, which refer to the Islamic aspect of relocation, are almost entirely ascribed to Muslim refugees. On the other hand, non-Muslims migrated to the Ottoman Empire mostly with political concerns and were called refugees (*mülteci*). The same dictionary defines refugees (*mülteci*) as asylum seekers fleeing to a place or a person to seek protection. For this entry, the author gives a highly political sentence without any religious attributes as follows: The return of refugees was one of the preconditions of the agreement.²² The Ottoman political discourse firmly embedded this distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim immigrants. For the Ottoman government, muhajirs were future citizens who would become loyal subjects. Accordingly, the muhajir population was immediately granted citizenship upon entry to Ottoman lands.²³ However, non-Muslim immigrants were not subject to this status since they were regarded as temporary inhabitants of the state.²⁴ Thus, the term muhajir implied a positive affirmation on Muslim refugees relocating into Ottoman lands. The emphasis on the movement of muhajirs with family members also refers to the nature of the mass migration originating from the Caucasus and the Balkans. During this period, muhajirs migrated with their families or with extended kinships. As a result, the attribution of the muhajir term to Muslim refugees reveals that the state viewed these groups as equivalent to its loyal Muslim subjects.

²¹ Ibid., “هجرت (*hicret*),” 1506.

²² Ibid., “ملتجى (*mülteci*),” 1400.

²³ Başak Kale, “Transforming an Empire: The Ottoman Empire’s Immigration and Settlement Policies in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 50:2, 261.

²⁴ Dündar, 88.

Thesis Outline

The first chapter of this study focuses on migration movements and state policies in the nineteenth century. It starts with a summary of displacements from Crimea and the Caucasus regions to signify the content of migration movements for the state. These examples will provide a clearer understanding of the context and help the audience better comprehend migration movements' content. Afterwards, the migration policies of the pre-Hamidian era are examined to understand the processes behind the settlement practices of Chechen refugees. Finally, focusing on the migration management of the Hamidian period, this section aimed to interpret refugee politics within the framework of contemporary policies. This broad framework is crucial to understanding the policies applied to Chechen refugee settlements during these periods. The second chapter will trace the socio-political and economic situation of the Ra's al-'Ayn region before refugee settlements. The region's sociopolitical history and demographical characteristics are pivotal to examining the later impacts of refugee settlements on the area. After detailing the regional context, the last section reviews the settlement processes of the first Chechen groups during the Azizian period. This part emphasizes the impact of the environment, regional powers, and state policies on the refugee settlements' adaptation to the region during the pre-Abdülhamid period. The last part focuses mainly on the transformation the Chechen settlements underwent in the Hamidian period. This part analyzes the core policies of this era on refugee settlements and compares them concerning communities of Ra's al-'Ayn. This part focuses on the emerging roles assumed by the Chechens, their operations within power dynamics and the regional status they ultimately achieved.

1 Ottoman Migration Policies

In this chapter, I initially will give a short history of the migration influx towards Ottoman lands to show the scale of the population settled in the empire. The chapter's primary focus will be migration policies throughout the nineteenth century. The primary intention of examining migration policies is to reveal their impacts on refugee settlements. Accordingly, this section will assess and question the objectives of the imperial policies on refugee populations. In the first section, I will focus on the migration policies of the pre-Hamidian era. Particularly before the mass migrations from Caucasia, the empire lacked the proper population for military campaigns and cultivation. The authorities intending to create agrarian, tax-paying communities within the empire had several strategies to attract European peasants to the empire; however, not long after this plan, a new refugee influx was directed from Caucasia and these policies aimed to be implemented through these refugee groups. After detailing these policies, I will continue exploring the strategies of the Hamidian era. The critical aspect of this part will be the relation of broader imperial politics with migration management.

1.1 Migration Policies until the Hamidian Era (1800-1876)

1.1.1 Mass Migration from Caucasia

For the Ottoman Empire, the nineteenth century was marked by imperial and trans-imperial mass migrations, which escalated in number as the century unfolded. Initially, populations were displaced due to territorial losses of the empire, and thousands began to flow into the Ottoman lands. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the migration of Crimean Tatars was one of the earliest and prominent mass movements. Tatar migration from Crimea to Ottoman lands began after the region's incorporation into Russian rule after a series of wars at the end of the eighteenth century.²⁵ After 1792, 80.000 left Crimea for Ottoman territories during the first decades of the nineteenth century, due to the Russian oppression. Later, the Crimean War between the Ottoman and Russian empires, fought from 1853 to 56, constituted a turning point in the Russian policies in the Caucasian region. The pre-war military tactic of demolishing resistance centers transformed into post-war military unit advancements. This led to the expulsion of local populations from the captured territories by Russia and was followed by the establishing of settlements in these areas with trusted population.²⁶ During and after the war until the 1860s, 150.000 Tatars settled in Ottoman Dobruca located in the Balkans and the following three years witnessed another mass migration of nearly 250.000 Crimeans. The refugee flow towards Ottoman lands started in the late eighteenth century and

²⁵ Hakan Kırımlı, "KIRIM", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2022), 457.

²⁶ Marc Pinson, "Kırım Savaşı'ndan Sonra Osmanlılar Tarafından Çerkeslerin Rumeli'ne İskanı", *Çerkeslerin Sürgünü 21 Mayıs 1864 (Tebliğler, Belgeler, Makaleler)*, (Ankara: Kafkas Derneği Yayınları, 2001), 42.

continued well until the early decades of the twentieth century; the total number of Tatars who migrated to Ottoman lands in this period is estimated as 1.800.000.²⁷

During the same era, other Caucasian communities that conflicted with Russia were also forced to leave the region en masse. When the resistance of the Caucasian communities against Russia under the leadership of Sheikh Shamil failed in 1859, the policy of Russification in the region intensified.²⁸ Accordingly, extensive discussions arose within the Russian government regarding the resettlement strategies for the Caucasian populace. Eventually, the Caucasian people were presented with two options: settling in the Kuban region or migrating to Ottoman lands.²⁹ To provide the logistics of migrations to Ottoman lands, Russian government established The Commission for Resettlement of Mountaineers (*Komissiiia po delu o pereselenii gortsev v Turtsiiu*) to Turkey in 1862 and sponsored boats to carry Caucasians to Ottoman ports.³⁰ Thus, the Ottoman Empire was aware of this proposal through diplomatic channels. In December 1863, the Russian consulate informed the Ottoman administration that while some Caucasians agreed to settle in the Kuban region, about fifty thousand wished to migrate to the Ottoman Empire. As the consulate report concludes, any opposition to this resettlement by the Ottomans would cause conflicts with the populace who would be forcibly settled in the Kuban.³¹

²⁷ Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 66.

²⁸ Pinson, 42.

²⁹ Arsen Avagyan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Kemalist Türkiye'nin Devlet-İktidar Sisteminde Çerkesler*, (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2004), 26-28.

³⁰ Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (California: Stanford University Press, 2024), 31.

³¹ Abdullah Saydam, *Kırım ve Kafkas Göçleri: 1856-1876*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1997), 75.

With the liberal immigration policies of the Ottoman Empire, Caucasian communities such as Circassians, Chechens and Dagestanis began to take refuge in the Ottoman state. After its peak in the spring of 1864 with 400.000 refugees³², migration from the Caucasian region continued at small scales until the first decades of the twentieth century.³³ Although there are varying opinions on the statistical scope of migration due to lack of official imperial statistics, it is estimated that the total number of Caucasians who migrated to the Ottoman Empire was between 500.000 to 2 million.³⁴

Transporting hundreds of thousands of refugees to Ottoman territories, particularly port cities, required an extensive logistic effort. Sea transit became the most efficient transportation, and ships were rented from different states to carry Caucasians from specific ports to the Ottoman Empire. Russian ports like Taman, Anapa, Novorosine, Adler, and Kerch were the departure points for the ships that would reach the Black Sea ports of Samsun and Trabzon and the Balkan port cities of Varna and Salonica. Subsequently, refugees were allocated to the inner cities within the Rumelian and Anatolian regions.³⁵ The Ottoman state intended to transport refugees to their designated destinations as fast as possible. After 1864, more than 300.000 Caucasian refugees resettled in Rumelia, mainly along the

³² Karpas, *Ottoman Population*, 67.

³³ Bedri Habıçolu, *Kafkaslardan Anadoluya Göçler*, (Istanbul: Nart Yayıncılık, 1993), 74-84.

³⁴ Both Russian and Ottoman scholars have varying statistics on this issue. To see a comprehensive list of datasets; Svetlana G. Kudayeva, "19. Yüzyıl Adige (Çerkes) Muhacereti: Tarihsel Anlamlandırma Deneyimi", in *Anavatanlarından Sürülüşlerinin 150. Yılında Çerkesler*, ed. Erdem Ünlü and Murat Duman, (Ankara: Kafdav Yayınları, 2015), 78-81.

³⁵ Karpas, 67-68; Saydam, 86-87.

borders of modern-day Bulgaria with Serbia and Albania.³⁶ Even though mass migration slowed down for about a decade with the establishment of these settlements, the empire faced a new mass displacement movement after the defeat in Russian War of 1877-78. The evacuation of the Caucasian refugee settlements from Rumelia and a further prohibition on new settlements in the area were two of the conference decisions agreed after the war.³⁷ The conflict resulted in the devastating loss of a significant portion of Ottoman Balkan territory, as well as the expulsion of many Muslims from Bulgaria. Consequently, after 1878, the Muslim Turkish and Caucasian population in Rumelia had to resettle in the remaining Ottoman lands of Anatolia and Arab provinces.

1.1.2 Earlier Policies of Migration

Before the mass migrations, the Ottoman Empire had a growing need for manpower across multiple sectors, primarily agriculture and the military. The state's marketing of Ottoman rural regions for European peasants was one clear sign of this necessity. Rumelian and Anatolian lands were advertised in 1857 as being available for tax-free cultivation to potential migrant peasants.³⁸ However, the refugee influx from the Caucasus, later from Rumelia, has reshaped this strategy, since refugees could turn into the new sources of agricultural activity in rural lands. Initially, the Ottoman Empire adopted a notably liberal policy towards migration. Agreeing to become a subject of the Sultan and respecting the country's laws was enough to

³⁶ Nedim İpek, *Rumeli'den Anadolu'ya Göçler*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1999), 4.

³⁷ İsmail Uzunçarşılı, "Tersane Konferansı'nın Mukarreratı Hakkında Şûra Mazbatası," *Tarih Dergisi* 6, 1954, 123-131.

³⁸ Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler*, (İstanbul: Timas Yayınları, 2013), 359-360.

enter and settle within the empire.³⁹ In line with this policy, refugee settlements received further exemptions from governmental obligations. Specifically, they were exempt from taxes and military service for six years in Rumelia and twelve years in Anatolia.⁴⁰ Long-lasting conflicts in this era resulted in a population decline, and the prevalence of nomadism led to the absence of agriculture in arable lands of the empire. In response to this crisis, the Ottoman Empire, whose economy was predominantly based on agriculture, settled refugees in rural areas far from city centers to fill the empty lands.⁴¹ In the long term, the Ottoman government aimed that these new settlements established in urban fertile regions would lead to an increase in agricultural production and tax-paying households.

Initially, with a few exceptions in Arab lands, most Caucasian refugee settlements were established in the Rumelian and Anatolian regions. Since the refugees transferred mainly through sea routes, port cities turned into transit centers for them. Cities such as Samsun, Trabzon and Istanbul were the primary locations for temporary settlements, where refugees had lengthy waiting periods for final placement. One of the prominent regions that constantly experienced this situation was Istanbul. Hence, the government developed various measures for the winter months to prevent the accumulation of refugees in the city. Considering that 8.000-10.000 thousand refugees were expected to arrive during the winter months of 1860,

³⁹ Başak Kale, "Transforming an Empire: The Ottoman Empire's Immigration and Settlement Policies in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 2, 2014, 258.

⁴⁰ Karpat, "Ottoman Immigration Policies and Settlement in Palestine", *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History, Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 786.

⁴¹ Uğur Ünal, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkas Göçleri I*, (Istanbul: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2012), 117-119.

a directive was issued for the construction of wooden huts that could accommodate 2.000 refugees in the Darülfünun region.⁴² Moreover, in 1864, 25.000 refugees were awaiting their initial destination for settlement in the port of Trabzon and over 150.000 refugees were in Anapa port waiting for transfer to Ottoman Black Sea ports. However, there was no suitable place for temporary settlement for those who arrived in Trabzon.⁴³ Consequently, refugees faced highly challenging conditions from the beginning of their journey until they reached their final destination. During this difficult journey, many refugees lost their lives due to disease, hunger and poverty.

The surviving population was transported to the interior parts of the empire as quickly as possible. Despite the vulnerability of the refugee groups, the Ottoman Empire implemented various policies regarding new settlements. Although the primary concern was the availability of vast vacant lands for tribal settlers, demographic factors also constituted a crucial part of the central strategy. The Ottoman Empire was keen to settle the Caucasian communities in the Rumelian region to increase the area's Muslim population against Russia's pan-Slavist policies.⁴⁴ In this context, Caucasian communities widely knew previous refugee experiences, influencing future refugees' behaviour. Particularly, the Crimean migration had an impact on subsequent refugee behaviour. In a report from 1859, it is stated that the generous aid provided to the Crimean refugees settled in the

⁴² A. MKT. MHM, 199/17 in Ünal, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkas Göçleri II*, (Istanbul: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2012), 43-44.

⁴³ I. DH, 524/36128 in Ünal, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkas Göçleri I*, 66-73.

⁴⁴ Erdal Taşbaş, *Halifenin Gölgesine Sığınanlar: Göçler ve Muhacirin-i İslamiye Komisyonu*, (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2017), 276.

Dobruja region encouraged other Caucasian communities to migrate to the Ottoman lands. However, several refugee groups were eager to settle in Anatolia rather than the Rumelian region to avoid separation from their relatives and Ottoman officials were advised to persuade these groups to settle in Rumelia to increase the Muslim population of the area.⁴⁵ Therefore, despite the substantial magnitude of the migration and the fragility of the settlement process, the Ottoman Empire had several fundamental objectives for the recently established refugee settlements.

Populating empty lands constituted only one aspect of the Ottoman Empire's liberal and pro-immigration stance during this era. Another crucial objective aimed at fulfilling refugee populations was the shortage of manpower in the army and the creation of internal security forces needed for regional security. Many Caucasian groups, especially Circassians and Chechens, were utilized as army units and gendarmerie forces throughout the empire. One of the best examples of this practice is the Circassian gendarmerie units deployed in the region to protect the Hejaz Railway from attacks by local Bedouin tribes during its construction.⁴⁶ Likewise, Chechens strategically positioned in the Kurdistan and were armed to ensure state control over the semi-autonomous tribes of the region.⁴⁷ The Ottoman state sought to establish armed forces that could be employed to control any group that opposed the central rule. Thus, in the regions, the state had limited authority, Caucasian armed groups filled the manpower shortage in the gendarmerie.

⁴⁵ İ. MMS, 16/649 in Ünal, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkas Göçleri I*, 24-29.

⁴⁶ Troyansky, 80.

⁴⁷ Hakan Asan, "Devlet, Aşiret ve Eşkiya Bağlamında Osmanlı Muhacir İskân Siyaseti", *Göç Araştırmaları Dergisi*(3), 2016, 48.

The mass migration also influenced the administrative system of the empire. The increasing mobility towards the Ottoman lands necessitated the creation of a separate administrative body responsible for migration processes. Until the Refugee Commission (*Muhacirin Komisyonu*) was established in January 1860, the settlement process of refugees was managed by various administrative structures following orders from the central authority and in the context of Istanbul, the *Şehremaneti* institution, which was responsible for municipal affairs, played the central role for coordinating the dispatch of refugees.⁴⁸ The first comprehensive instruction (*talimat*) regarding refugees was written in 1856 by Sublime Porte, it was exclusively on the Crimean refugees' settlement process. This regulation underscored that refugees, regardless of their religion and sect, were exempt from taxes and military service. Further it emphasized the necessity of settling refugees in fertile lands alongside their families and relatives, with state aid provided to support their agricultural activities.⁴⁹ The newly established Refugee Commission assumed responsibility of the duties specified in this instruction, and several branches of the commission formed in many provinces. The appointment of Ottoman officials of Caucasian or Tatar origin was the primary practice throughout the life of the commission.⁵⁰ In addition, an early policy of the Refugee Commission involved allocating the refugee population through communicating with the leaders of the Caucasian tribes.⁵¹ This direct contact between the commission and the Caucasian leaders aimed to address the issues of the refugees with most efficient and prompt

⁴⁸ Saydam, 103-105.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

⁵⁰ David Cuthell, "The Muhacirin Komisyonu: An agent in the transformation of Ottoman Anatolia, 1860–66," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2005), 104.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

manner. In conclusion, the Ottoman Empire's institutions developed according to the refugee flows. The first decades of migrations were managed with separate administrative units without a uniform system. However, the mass migrations necessitated a new administration system to reduce urban centers' workloads and create a unified system to govern the refugee population.

1.2 Migration Policies of the Hamidian Era (1876-1909)

In terms of migration, a pivotal event for the Hamidian Era was the turmoil in the Balkan region. Uprisings broke out between 1875 and 1876 in Herzegovina, Bulgaria, and Montenegro, followed by a war with Serbia, which led to the Constantinople Conference in 1876. The evacuation of Circassian refugee settlements from Rumelia and a suggestion to forbid future settlements in the area were among the decisions made during the meeting.⁵² However, the Ottoman Empire rejected the conference's resolutions, which led to the outbreak of the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War. A significant portion of the Ottoman Balkans were lost due to the conflict. After the Ottoman defeat, a new mass migration began towards the Ottoman lands. Along with Rumelian Muslims, Caucasian refugees who had previously settled in Rumelia poured into the Ottoman ports. It is estimated that between one and 1.5 million Muslims fled the Rumelia, with an average of 300.000 being Caucasian refugees.⁵³ This relocation increased the Muslim population of the

⁵² İsmail Uzunçarşılı, "Tersane Konferansı'nın Mukarreratı Hakkında Şûra Mazbatası," *Tarih Dergisi* 6, 1954, 123-131.

⁵³ Habiçoğlu, *Kafkasya'dan Anadolu'ya Göçler*, p.150; İzzet Aydemir, *Göç: Kuzey Kafkasyalıların Göç Tarihi*, (Ankara: Gelişim Mabaası, 1988), 136.

empire and became one of the significant sources of Islamization policy of Abdulhamid II.

After the war, the Ottoman Empire had many refugees and limited lands to resettle the people. Anatolian and Arab provinces became the leading territories in which new settlements were formed. However, this time, the resettlement process was influenced by foreign powers as well. Russia sought to displace the Caucasian population from Rumelia and further pushed the Ottoman administration to prevent the resettlement of Caucasian refugees in eastern Anatolia near the Russian border. The Ottomans accepted the condition of not establishing refugee settlements beyond the line of Samsun, Amasya, Tokat and Erzincan.⁵⁴ In addition to external forces, internal factors also influenced the refugee settlement process. Since the refugees settled in large groups, the availability of the vast lands was necessary. In some provinces, especially central Anatolian cities like Sivas, Konya and Ankara, no lands were suitable for refugee settlements containing large households. Consequently, the government turned its focus to the frontier provinces and Arab lands to form new refugee settlements.⁵⁵ After the large influx of refugees, the government had to find vacant lands suitable for these large groups. However, external and internal obstacles limited the available lands, especially in the Anatolian region. Aware of this situation, the Ottoman state turned to eastern Anatolia and Arab lands, where empty and fertile areas were available for refugee settlements.

Establishing refugee settlements in eastern provinces correlated with the imperial policies of implementing central authority in these regions. Mainly, after the

⁵⁴ Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 69; Ipek, *Imparatorluktan Ulus Devlete Göçler*, 62.

⁵⁵ Habiçoğlu, 153-155.

territorial losses in the Balkans, the Hamidian administration focused on the remaining Anatolian and Arab regions.⁵⁶ To discourage nomadism and promote a sedentary lifestyle, Muslim refugee communities and their settlements were highly instrumental. Since they were considered loyal subjects of the sultan, the Ottoman administration established new refugee settlements, especially in areas used as pastures by nomadic tribes. Ahmet Cevdet, one of the leading statesmen of the period who served as the governor of Aleppo during the reign of Abdulhamid II, clearly demonstrated the importance of refugee settlements for promoting a sedentary lifestyle in nomadic tribes. The Afşar tribe, one of the prominent nomadic tribes of the Uzunyayla region in Central Anatolia, was forced to embrace a settled lifestyle through Circassian refugee settlements. The tribe was required to choose and settle in one of the regions they traditionally use as summer pasture or winter shelter, abandoning the other for the establishment of refugee settlements.⁵⁷ Another notable example of this practice is the Amman refugee settlement plan, which was planned to be established in the deserts of the Province of Syria against the Bedouin tribes. A detailed report written by Kamil Pasha in 1878 reveals the central government's main strategies in the empire's peripheral regions. According to the report, the territories used by Bedouin groups would gradually be taken over through several hundred Caucasian refugee households settling in the region.⁵⁸ As in Anatolia, the plan demanded either the sedentarization of Bedouins or their relocation further into the inner parts of the desert. Hence, in response to significant

⁵⁶ Engin Deniz Akarlı, "Abdülhamid's Attempt to Integrate Arabs into the Ottoman System," in *Palestine in The Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social and Economic Transformation*, ed. David Kushner, (Brill, 1986), 75.

⁵⁷ Cevdet Paşa, *Tezâkir 21-39*, ed. Cavid Baysun, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1986), 157.

⁵⁸ Halil Sahillioğlu, "A Project for the Creation of Amman Vilayet (1878)," in *Studies on Ottoman Economic and Social History*, (Istanbul: Ircica, 1999), 177-188.

territorial losses in the Hamidian era, the Ottoman government initiated an intense centralization policy in the regions still under control. The central administration aimed to achieve this policy by actively using the refugee population in military support, security enhancement, and settlement projects.

The Ottoman government, aiming to benefit from the refugee population in the country, further encouraged the refugee flow from the Caucasus. The government initially followed a liberal policy to refugee admission and later adopted more restrictive immigration policies, especially during the reign of Abdulhamid II.⁵⁹ During this period, in parallel with the migration flows into the empire, there were also emigrations to other countries from the Ottoman lands, and the central government played an active role in this demographic change. In particular, Islamization and Sunnification of Ottoman society, which were among the central policies of the Hamidian administration, also had a crucial impact on immigration policies. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, authorities pursued to restrict the entry of non-Muslim refugees while encouraging the Muslim ones.⁶⁰ Parallel with this policy, the Ottoman Empire tried to mobilize the Caucasian communities through the Naqshbandi order, which was the dominant religious authority in the region.⁶¹ Tribal leaders and sheikhs invited to the empire were promised a new homeland where they could practice their religion freely under the protection of the Islamic caliphate,

⁵⁹ Kale, 260-262.

⁶⁰ In the early twentieth century, a new decree forbade non-Muslims to enter Ottoman Empire from Russia; in İsmet Binark, *Osmanlı Devleti ile Kafkasya, Türkistan ve Kırım Hanlıkları Arasındaki Münâsebetlere Dâir Arşiv Belgeleri: 1687-1908 Yılları Arası*, (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 1992), 93.

⁶¹ Hamed-Troyanski, *Empire of Refugees*, p.209; Nihat Berzeg, *Gerçek Tarihi ve Politik Nedenleriyle Çerkes Sürgünü*, (Ankara, 1996), 139-143.

receive financial aid, and be granted exemptions that would enable them to adopt to this new life. In some cases, tribal leaders were even given autonomy in selecting their new places of settlements.⁶² Moreover, many sheikhs who settled in the Ottoman Empire received regular salaries.⁶³ As a result, migration policies became instrumental to further change the demographic structure of the empire during this period. The state, while increasing its Muslim population through mass migration, simultaneously witnessed a decline in its non-Muslim population, primarily through territorial loss.

The emphasis on the Islamic characteristic of the empire further led to the transformation of institutions. In every aspect of the Hamidian Era, the caliphate and its symbolic meaning for the Muslim world were emphasized. In 1887, following lengthy discussions on migration after thirty-nine sessions, the Hamidian government chose to welcome all Muslims as refugees who were being mistreated under a non-Muslim state.⁶⁴ Further, in 1899, Abdulhamid established a new refugee commission that would continue its existence until 1908.⁶⁵ This commission was designated as the Commission for Muslim Refugees (*Muhacirin-i Islamiye Komisyonu*) reflecting the government's emphasis on the refugees' Muslim identity. Under this commission, several new financial support mechanisms were developed to finance the refugee settlements. One such initiative was the stamp arrangement. This practice consisted

⁶² BOA, HR.MKT. 639/54.

⁶³ BOA, A. MKT.NZD. 146/70; BOA, A.} MKT.NZD. 243/43; BOA, DH.MKT. 514/97.

⁶⁴ Karpat, "The Status of the Muslim Under European Rule: The Eviction and Settlement of the Çerkes," in *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 662-663.

⁶⁵ Ufuk Erdem, *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Muhacir Komisyonları ve Faaliyetleri 1860-1923*, (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2020), 136.

of additional fees charged for some official documents considered valuable. The compulsory stamping system provided an extra income for refugee funds. Another example was the organization of a lottery through the Ziraat Bank to meet the housing needs of Muslim refugees and offer them agricultural tools.⁶⁶ Thus, the commission was eager to collect sufficient resources to support refugee settlements through extra funding and worked towards this ideal by establishing new means of subsistence. Hence, during the Hamidian era, the Islamic aspect of the empire was given more importance, and the Muslim refugees were an essential part of the caliphate's promotion among the Muslim world. As the legitimate caliph of the Muslims, the sultan adapted the migration institutions according to the Islamic tradition he emphasized. Abdulhamid favoured the Muslim refugees by depicting himself as the benevolent caliph of Muslims. Hence, during the Hamidian era, the migration policies of the empire aligned with the Islamization policies and were utilized to establish trans-imperial control over the Muslim populations.

The administration aimed to establish state-sponsored settlements in strategically chosen regions to maximize the efficacy of Ottoman refugee settlement. The refugee commissions provided several settlement plans for the villages. The primary characteristic of these grid system villages was the incorporation of a mosque and school in every settlement.⁶⁷ Although the state aimed to finance the construction of mosques and schools independently, this was not possible for all settlements due to the financial crisis. In cases where the government could not

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.128-134.

⁶⁷ Numerous reports from the Ottoman archives shows the construction of schools and mosques in refugee settlements; BOA, MKT.MHM. 503/19; BOA, ML.EEM. 269/70; BOA, MVL. 1059/59.

provide the necessary support, the local population assisted the refugees.⁶⁸ Additionally, the state built only some refugee villages. There were no grid plans for the villages established by refugees with their means. Instead, refugees established villages in these regions based on the settlement style specific to their homelands.⁶⁹ The self-established refugee villages collectively constructed their schools and mosques. In certain provinces like Bursa, deeply established traditions like the endowment system (*vakıf*) were utilized in the construction and maintenance of these socio-religious sites.⁷⁰ The establishment of schools and mosques in every refugee settlement paralleled the Islamization policy of this era. The education of the inhabitants in Anatolia and Arab lands was carried out with a focus on Sunni Islam, regarded as the state's proper practice. Furthermore, throughout the 19th century, education became an increasingly important institution of social discipline and modernization for the state. Tribes, bedouins, and refugee populations' integration into the state would be accomplished by promoting Sunnism and devotion to the caliphate and the state via education that stressed Ottoman Turkish.⁷¹ Additionally, specific Caucasian populations practiced Islam in a way that was foreign to the Ottoman Empire. They practiced a syncretic religion that blended aspects of Christianity and paganism, carried pork, and were ignorant of the teachings of

⁶⁸ Some instances of locals supporting the refugees; BOA, DH.MKT. 202/15; BOA, A.} MKT.UM. 793/64; BOA, A.} MKT.UM. 512/76; BOA, DH.MKT. 1411/106.

⁶⁹ Zeynep Eres & Nur Akın, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Döneminde Kurulan Planlı Kırsal Yerleşmeler," *İTÜ Dergisi Seri A: Mimarlık, Planlama, Tasarım* 9, no.1 2010, 86-87.

⁷⁰ Nilüfer Ateş, "Bursa'da Kurulan Muhacir Vakıfları (1883-1917)". *Uludağ Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 21:39, 2020.

⁷¹ Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 219.

Islamic rituals.⁷² Thus, the Hamidian era underscored the importance of the Islamic identity of the empire and shaped its approach to refugee populations accordingly. As a result, spatial arrangements were shaped around the mosques and schools, emphasizing Sunni Islam.

In 1880, a British colonel travelling through central Anatolia wrote a report concerning the new refugee population in the area. His emphasis was on the potential positive impact of the refugee population on Ottoman lands, highlighting their strong physique and evident skills in agriculture.⁷³ Without doubt, the Ottoman Empire was aware of this potential and had various strategies and objectives for the refugee population. Refugees would fill the vacant lands, engage in agriculture, and become tax-paying loyal subjects of the empire. The central authority was eager to realize these strategies, particularly in eastern Anatolia and Arab lands where the semi-independent tribes were prominent.⁷⁴ Especially in weak state authority, refugee settlements were established to serve as loyal subjects of the caliph. However, hundreds of refugee settlements spread over such a wide area could not comply with an ideal plan, and this plan, which was ideally perfect, encountered many problems in practice.

⁷² Seteney Shami, "Historical Processes of Identity Formation: Displacement, Settlement, and Self-Representations of the Circassians in Jordan," *Iran and the Caucasus* 13, no. 1, 2009, 146.

⁷³ TNA. FO 424/106 No. 186.

⁷⁴ Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*, 18.

2 Ottoman Rule in Ra's al-'Ayn District (1800-1909): Tribes, Reforms and Settlements

This section will provide a comprehensive analysis of the sociopolitical and demographic characteristics of the Ra's al-'Ayn district, with a particular focus on conditions before the establishment of Chechen refugee settlements. A thorough examination of the sociopolitical situation within the broader territory is a crucial aspect of the analysis, ensuring a thorough understanding of the refugee settlements' impact on the region. The initial focus of the chapter will be on the region's political, geographical and demographic conditions. This analysis will be followed by a detailed reading of the area's political history, focusing on the interactions between the regional powers and the state in the first half of the nineteenth century. The chapter will primarily concentrate on the political situation of the pre-Hamidian era, with a particular emphasis on the implications of the Tanzimat policies on eastern provinces. Given that these reforms brought about significant changes in the provinces, their influence on the local population is a crucial aspect to investigate in order to understand the political atmosphere in which refugees settled. In the final section, I will discuss the formation process of the first Chechen settlements, with a focus on the primary objectives of the empire in settling them in Ra's al-'Ayn district.

Due to the lack of sources in the secondary literature on the Ra's al-'Ayn region, this section relies extensively on primary sources. One crucial source was the provincial yearbooks of Diyarbekir, as the Ra's al-'Ayn functioned under this province for several years. The first editions of the almanacs contain valuable details

on the district's social and political situation. The respective sections of the yearbooks detail the administrative division of the district, village names and their heads, along with a special section written on the nomadic tribes of the region. These details on regional tribes are further supported by Ziya Gökalp's, a prominent statesman of the era, report on the region's demographical characteristics.⁷⁵ Another crucial source on the region belongs to Vital Cuinet, the French geographer who was assigned to conduct economic, social and cultural inventory studies of Ottoman cities on behalf of The Ottoman Public Debt Administration (*Duyun-u Umumiye-i Osmaniye*). Ra's al-'Ayn is situated under the Zor Province in Cuinet's investigation of eastern lands.⁷⁶ His work is critical for this research as it provides extensive details on the district's administrative, economic, geographic, and demographic aspects. Finally, I will consult several reform proposals (*islahat layihaları*) prepared by high-ranking officials of Zor Province and the provincial journal of Diyarbekir to assess the official perspectives regarding the region.

2.1 Political, Geographic and Demographic Characteristics of the Region

Ra's al-'Ayn was a small district located on the periphery of the desert area in the Kurdistan region. Despite this location, its name, meaning "head of spring", derives from Khabur river, a side stream of the Euphrates.⁷⁷ In medieval times, this region was renowned for its rich springs, and Arab geographers characterized it as

⁷⁵ Ziya Gökalp, *Kürt Aşiretleri Hakkında Sosyolojik Tetkikler*, (Istanbul: Toker Yayınları, 2013).

⁷⁶ Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie, Géographie Administrative Tome Deuxieme*, (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1891).

⁷⁷ Ernst Honigmann, "Ra's al-'Ayn", *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Volume VIII, (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 433.

having blooming gardens.⁷⁸ Concerning the Ottoman era, the first official mentioning of Ra's al-'Ayn as a separate district is found in the Ottoman yearbook of Diyarbekir issued in 1869. In this edition, Ra's al-'Ayn is registered as a district under the sub-province of Diyarbekir.⁷⁹ While the first editions of almanacs were lacking relatively detailed information, the section of Ra's al-'Ayn provides crucial details on the demographic component of the region. Accordingly, the district consists of six communes (*nahiye*) named as Derik, Viransehir, Milli, Kiki Cerkan, Kiki Halican and Dekori with a section additionally noting the communal heads.⁸⁰ The titles of the communes corresponds to the names of Kurdish tribes that were active in the region.⁸¹ Further, in this section, the headmen of each commune were indicated, and they were the tribal leaders noted with the title of agha. The second edition of the yearbook depicted a similar organization for the Ra's al-'Ayn district with no changes in the structure or administration of the communes.⁸² In the following years, the administrative listing of Ra's al-'Ayn under the Diyarbekir Province would change with the creation of Zor Province and in 1874 the district would be incorporated into Zor.⁸³

Between 1855 and 1869, Zor was a commune functioned under the administration of Aleppo, and overseen by a governor. However, in 1870, the Province of Zor established with Deyr being its central district.⁸⁴ The establishment of

⁷⁸ Ibid., 434.

⁷⁹ Salname-i Vilayet-i Diyarbekir, 1286/1869.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁸¹ To see a detailed account of Kurdish tribes in the region; Mark Sykes, "The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 38, 1908.

⁸² Salname-i Vilayet-i Diyarbekir, 1287/1870, 49.

⁸³ Salname-i Devlet-i Aliyye-i Osmaniyye, 1291/1874, 253.

⁸⁴ Idris Bostan, "Zor Sancağı'nın İmar ve Islahı İle Alakalı Üç Layiha". *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 6, 1986, 164.

the Zor Province was the result of a successful campaign against nomadic tribes of the region. After the forces under the command of Omer Pasha ensure peace in the region and secured the Aleppo-Baghdad caravan route, the district began to flourish as an important supply and trade center.⁸⁵ Subsequent years witnessed further growth in infrastructure. The first governor of the Zor Province, Arslan Pasha (1870-1871), built hans on the side of the caravan route and stationed soldiers along this line for road safety.⁸⁶ However, to implement these measures efficiently Arslan Pasha requested Zor to be placed directly under the authority of the Interior Ministry. Consequently, the request was accepted and Zor became an autonomous district.⁸⁷ Later, the district of Ra's al-'Ayn incorporated and remained under the jurisdiction of Zor Province despite the debates of its subjection to other provinces like Aleppo or Diyarbekir.⁸⁸ Due to its proximity to these two surrounding provinces respective governors wanted to incorporate the district under their jurisdiction, particularly these demands emerged when the regional tribes or bandits assaulted the sedentary populations of these provinces. By incorporating the district provincial governors sought to have greater control over the nomadic tribes. Henceforth, Ra's al-'Ayn district located in the far north of the Zor Province, administratively bordered to the west by Aleppo Province; to the east by Mosul Province and to the north by Diyarbekir.⁸⁹ However, bordering several provinces and geographically separated by Abdulaziz mountains from the main district of the Zor Province, Ra's al-'Ayn

⁸⁵ Idris Bostan, "Deyrizor", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (Istanbul: TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1994), 269.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie, Géographie Administrative Tome Deuxieme*, 275-276.

⁸⁸ Idris Bostan, "Zor Sancağı'nın İmar Ve Islahı İle Alakalı Üç Layiha". *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 6, 1986, 164.

⁸⁹ Cuinet, 310.

persisted as a region affected by the administrative policies of the surrounding governors.

Zor Province was geographically divided into two regions by the Euphrates River. Initially, the district of Ra's al-'Ayn, located in the far north, was founded on the passageway of the Khabur Spring, which was also a tributary of the Euphrates. This region has hosted several civilizations throughout history and was compared to Egypt by the Ottoman administrators due to its water resources.⁹⁰ A crucial earlier account of the region belongs to the J.G. Taylor, the British Consul of Kurdistan. He made extensive journeys across the province during his tenure in 1860s. In his lengthy travels, Taylor provides a thorough account of Khabur River, its tributaries and consequently, on Ra's al-'Ayn. While previously Khabur was regarded as a high drainage river, Taylor observed that its seven tributaries were unstable due to lack of a fixed source or consistent supply of water.⁹¹ However, the potential of the region as a fertile land proven by the high-quality cotton raised in the region several hundred years ago. For this reason Taylor argues in his accounts that with an efficient water system and a liberal government this deserted region would transform into a productive plain.⁹² Further detailing the Ra's al-'Ayn district, he states that the ancient town was built above the springs while the new settlements were established on the hollow between two rivers, despite all the sanitary concerns.⁹³ This comparison of old and new settlements based on geographical locations points out

⁹⁰ Bostan, 169-170.

⁹¹ J.G. Taylor, "Journal of a Tour in Armenia, Kurdistan, and Upper Mesopotamia, with Notes of Researches in the Deyrsim Dag, in 1866", *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 38, 1868, 348.

⁹² Taylor, "Travels in Kurdistan, with Notices of the Sources of the Eastern and Western Tigris, and Ancient Ruins in Their Neighbourhood", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 35 (1865), 54.

⁹³ Taylor, "Journal of a Tour in Armenia", 349.

the importance of settlement planning. Indeed, the low-lying areas were prone to unhygienic conditions that can be caused by poor drainage or floods. Consequently, the water accumulation in hollows could lead to unsanitary environments that are susceptible to infectious diseases.

At the same time, for the Ottoman officials, the Khabur Spring only made the region perfectly suitable for the new settlers. The ongoing political struggle against the local nomadic tribes necessitated the establishment of new settlements in the region. Under this political agenda one official from Zor Province detailed a plan exclusively focusing on the possible benefits of the water resources. Muhammed Hilal Efendi, an official originating from the region, offered these visions on the reconstruction of the province in 1871.⁹⁴ Concerning the Khabur Spring and Ra's al-'Ayn district, Muhammed Efendi suggested that the existing springs would develop into the equivalent of the ones in Egypt, if water channels are constructed to irrigate the region. Moreover, since the region was home to the ancient civilizations throughout history, the infrastructure like waterways in ancient sites could be useful for the reconstruction of the proper resources. Especially, the presence of ancient water channels were noteworthy and with their restoration the whole surrounding region could become feasible for development.⁹⁵ Furthermore, in his report, Muhammed Efendi emphasized the crucial role of Khabur Spring for the previous civilizations of the region. The fame and the grace of the Khabur was narrated by Arabian poets, mentioning the finest gardens, lofty trees and noble streams surrounding the river. Even after the death of one ruler, the poems written for his

⁹⁴ Bostan, "Zor Sancağı'nın İmar ve Islahı", 168.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 175.

tribute were addressing the trees surrounding the Khabur.⁹⁶ For the central government the potential of this deserted and desolate region to transform into a prosperous one was achievable owing to natural resources in the district like Khabur River. Narrations depicting the prosperity of earlier civilizations in the same region further served as justification for this approach. Therefore, with its existing river network, Ra's al-'Ayn district had great potentials for a sufficient agricultural production. Nevertheless, to realize this potential, the sites for new settlements must be selected in accordance with the geographical characteristics of the region.

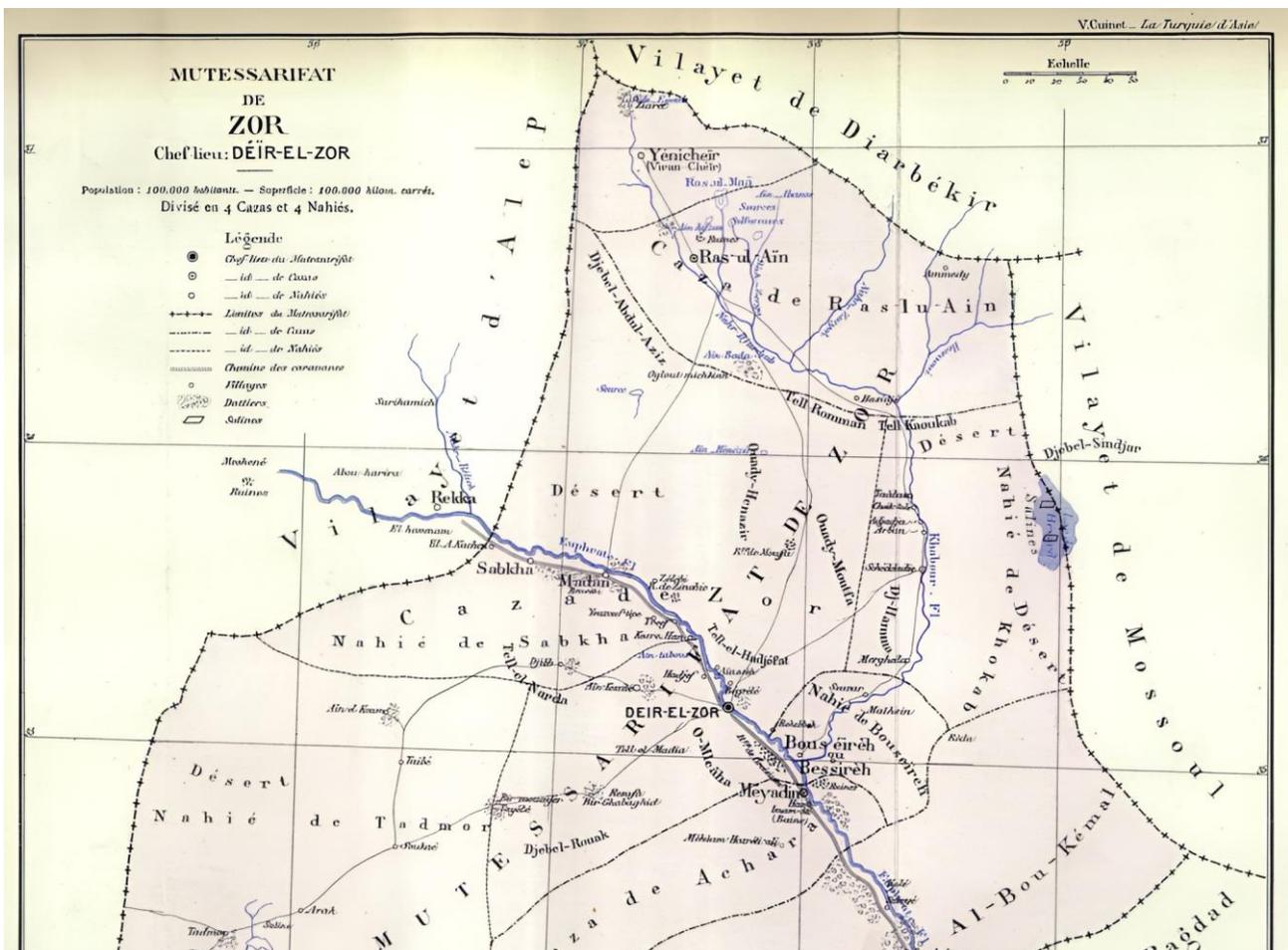


Figure 1: The administrative map of Zor Province in 1891.

Source: Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie d'Asie, Géographie Administrative Tome Deuxieme*, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1891.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 175-176.

2.1.1 Demography of the Region

Ra's al-'Ayn district and its vicinity have been the seat of nomadic tribes since the Ottoman conquest of the region. Since these groups were semi-independent, population censuses could not be carried out by the state in their respective regions. However, the estimated population of the tribes are noted in the censuses of 1881-1893 as 150.000 for the Province of Zor.⁹⁷ These tribes can be divided into two main groups as Kurdish tribes and Arab Bedouins. Concerning the Kurdish tribes of the region, they were long-established before the Ottoman Empire and were largely Muslim.⁹⁸ Since they had greater authority on the eastern part of the empire, Ottoman rulers employed a policy based on concessions and this further strengthened the power of Kurdish chiefs.⁹⁹ Arab Bedouin groups had similar political positions in the region. While they enjoyed a semi-autonomous position with the privileges granted to them, they were also subjected to several duties by the state. One critical event of cooperation between the government and Bedouin occurred during the time of Muslim pilgrimage. The security of the pilgrimage caravans was a concern for the state and some Bedouin groups were responsible to protect the pilgrims.¹⁰⁰ This was one occasion where the direct rule of the government would be present in the region, aside from that tribes held considerable power and autonomy. Moreover, the tribes were mostly nomads and dwelled in several regions throughout

⁹⁷ Karpas, *Ottoman Population*, 150.

⁹⁸ Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire*, 25.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Schatkowski Schilcher, "The Hauran Conflicts of the 1860s: A Chapter in the Rural History of Modern Syria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 2, (1981), 159.

the year. Since they practiced an independent life, tribes did not reside in villages or cultivated lands, instead they depended on pastoral lifestyle with their large flocks.¹⁰¹

Yearbook of Diyarbekir dated from 1871 provides the tribal structure of the region with a great detail and offers invaluable insights on government's perspective on these groups. As a crucial primary source, the respective section in the yearbook devoted to tribal composition, categorizes the tribes into two main groups. The first section referred as Bedouin Tribes (*aşayir-i urban*) comprises the tribes of Shammar, Tayy, Sherabi, Bakari and Cubur. The other group mentioned as Arabized Tribes (*aşayir-i musta'rab*) contains the tribes of Milli, Kiki, Dekori and Karakecili. To interpret this distinction, reports written on these tribes in 1921 by Ziya Gökalp, a statesman and scholar of the period, can be a useful guide. According to Gökalp, tribes like Shammar, Cubur, and Bakari defined as Bedouin groups, dwell deep in deserted regions and functioning like an army ready for combat, thus continuing their existence as a constant threat to the surrounding groups. On the other hand, other nomadic tribes like Milli, Karakeci, and Dekori are the ones reside in the edges of the desert rather than the inner parts. Gökalp further mentions that the reason of the nomadic structure of the Arabized tribes is the threat that posed by the Bedouins.¹⁰² Hence, the reason of this division was based on the geographical locations and the customs of respective tribes. Moreover, regarding the administrative divisions of Ra's al-'Ayn district several villages were named after the tribes which were predominantly mobile in the region like Milli, Kiki and Dekori.¹⁰³ This naming practice reveals the extent of influence the tribes had in the area. With their historical

¹⁰¹ Yonca Köksal, "Coercion and Mediation: Centralization and Sedentarization of Tribes in the Ottoman Empire", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, (2006), 476-477.

¹⁰² Gökalp, *Kürt Aşiretleri Hakkında Sosyolojik Tetkikler*, 51.

¹⁰³ Salname-i Vilayet-i Diyarbekir, 1288/1871, 186-191.

presence and control over specific lands, tribes had considerable impacts on shaping the regional socioeconomic and geographic structures of these deserted and sparsely populated regions. Thus, examining the tribal affiliations and characteristics to understand the historical context of the region is notably essential to identify the socio-political atmosphere in which refugees were settled in the early 1860s.

2.1.1.1 Bedouin Tribes

Among the Bedouin tribes the Shammar was stated in Ottoman sources as a group affiliated with the Anizah confederation, one of the largest Bedouin tribes of the period.¹⁰⁴ This group is predominantly categorized as raiders and looters in many official reports and yearbooks. Anizah tribes described as having long hair with braids and did not wear shoes. Women and men had similar clothing styles while women distinguished with their earrings or painted faces, hands and feet. Their main diet consisted of bread, dates, and camel milk. They used tents made of camel hair and wooden poles as housing. The tents had two sections separated by reed for men and women.¹⁰⁵ Considered as a group under this confederation, the Shammar tribe, was estimated to have around 10.000 to 15.000 tents, consists of three main families. Labeled as raiders by the state, the tribe was also a well-known producer of oil and wool. Since they possessed large numbers of sheep and camel, Shammar tribe was a distinguished group for merchants to buy ghee and wool.¹⁰⁶ Owing to their intense trade activities, they were wealthier than other tribes in the region. As a

¹⁰⁴ Abdülkerim Özaydın, "Anaze", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (İstanbul: TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1991), 196.

¹⁰⁵ Bostan, "Zor Sancağı'nın İmar ve Islahı", 172.

¹⁰⁶ Salname-i Vilayet-i Diyarbekir, 1288/1871, 186.

nomadic tribe, they would reside around Sinjar in the winter and migrate to Abdulaziz Mountain in summers.¹⁰⁷ The wealth they gained from the commercial networks allowed Shammar tribe to maintain their large flocks of sheep and camels and to a greater extent enabled them to dominate the region. With this economic advantage they preserved their semi-nomadic lifestyle, which was necessary to graze their livestock in the ideal settings.

Other Bedouin tribes had considerably lower population when compared with the Shammar. Initially, the Tayy tribe consisted of a few hundred households, over time they reached up to three thousand tents with tribal alliances. The tribe was practiced nomadic lifestyle but also engaged in agricultural activities. Their villages were located around Nusaybin region. However, despite practicing farming they moved and resided in different region throughout the year. For the government one difference between Shammar and Tayy was the tax paying leaders of the Tayy tribe, at least to an extent.¹⁰⁸ Whereas, the Sherabis were a small tribe with five hundred households. They cultivated grain but heavily involved in husbandry. With their cattle and Anatolian buffalo flocks, Sherabi tribe produced ghee and traded with nearby towns of Urfa and Siverek districts. While residing in Abdülaziz Mountains in winter, they moved to Ra's al-'Ayn and Khabur in summers.¹⁰⁹ Another bedouin tribe of the region was Bakarıs and they had around one thousand households. Their main livestock was husbandry and they moved between Khabur and Rakka each season.¹¹⁰ The last bedouin tribe of the region that mentioned by the Ottoman state was Cubur. They were also a small tribe with six hundred households, but their

¹⁰⁷ Gökalp, 90.

¹⁰⁸ Salname-i Vilayet-i Diyarbekir, 1288/1871, 188.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Gökalp, 90.

lifestyle was similar to Tayy tribe with their cultivation practices. Cubur tribe used the lands in Deyrizor region for winters and resided near Ra's al-'Ayn and Khabur in summers.¹¹¹ Thus, the Bedouin tribes noted by the state officials in almanacs consisted of five major groups. When examining the descriptions of the Bedouins, the agricultural activities they were engaged, at least to an extent, is noteworthy since these tribes extensively defined with their nomadic traditions. However, tribes mostly cultivated the land for the elites of the nearby provinces with a small share.¹¹² Consequently, some tribes also practiced husbandry to trade both their herds and dairy products with local communities. Another significant remark is the large scale of migration patterns and vast regions where the tribes actively operated. The extent of migration reaching from Sinjar within the Mosul Province to Siverek in Diyarbekir shows the wide range of influence the tribes had in the eastern provinces of the empire.

2.1.1.2 Arabized Tribes

This group referred as Arabized tribes by the state, dominated the Ra's al-'Ayn district and several communes named after them. The description of this second group of tribes is different from the first group. Unlike the Bedouins, the yearbook neither contain the estimated numbers of the tribes nor demonstrates lengthy or detailed figures. Most lengthy record belongs to the Milli Tribe, which consists two main branches. The first branch of these tribes is the Temavizâdes, lived around Viranşehir and adopted a nomadic lifestyle. They engaged in agriculture

¹¹¹ Salname-i Vilayet-i Diyarbekir, 1288/1871, 189.

¹¹² Gökalp, 91.

and husbandry as their main source of income and fulfilled the tax obligations.¹¹³ Other branch of the Millis resided between Ra's al-'Ayn and Mardin. They settled in their farms during the harvest time and later moved to villages for husbandry. Both tribes had large livestock and were involved in trade. They spoke Arabic and Kurdish languages and were Shafi Muslims.¹¹⁴ Similarly, the Kiki Tribe consists of two groups as Kiki Cerkan and Kiki Hulcan. The tribe was settled between Ra's al-'Ayn and Mardin and has similar characteristics to the Milli Tribe in terms of lifestyle, agricultural and commercial activities, along with the spoken languages. The Dekori and Karakecili Tribes were residing in the surrounding regions and were known with similar characteristics of the other Arabized tribes.¹¹⁵

Although numerous tribes were active in this territory for centuries, to understand the social, political and economic situation of the period, only the groups referred in the primary sources from that era are included in this section. While the active roles of Bedouin groups in the regional economy are widely covered in sources, the regions they utilized as summer and winter residences further reveal their vast sphere of influence they had within the desert region. Whereas the Arabized tribes unlike the Bedouins, lived on the edges of the desert. The summer and winter quarters displays that they mostly moved around Ra's al-'Ayn, Mardin and Siverek. Thus, Arabized tribes preferred the northern parts of the region rather than the inner desert which extended further south. As a result of their domination in the edges the few villages in the Ra's al-'Ayn region named after the tribes and governed by tribal chiefs.

¹¹³ Salname-i Vilayet-i Diyarbekir, 1288/1871, 189.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 190.

2.2 Centralization Efforts of the Ottoman Empire in Kurdistan

The early nineteenth century witnessed a significant decline of central authority in Eastern and Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire. Due to repeated wars and defeats against Russia in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the central authority deeply weakened, particularly in the provinces. The era between the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, was marked with the extending regional power of provincial governors like Muhammed Ali Pasha. After securing his authority in Egypt without a considerable encounter with the Ottomans, Ibrahim Pasha, son of Muhammed Ali, started his campaigns in Syria and Kurdistan. In 1839, confrontation of Ottoman forces with the Ibrahim Pasha in western Kurdistan resulted with the Ottoman defeat.¹¹⁶ Later, Ibrahim was even successful of suppressing some of the disobedient Kurdish chiefs. These Kurdish tribes residing in the region maintained a de facto autonomy for centuries and were entirely independent of their own internal affairs.¹¹⁷ For centuries, Kurdish emirates were responsible of sending troops in wartime, securing the borders and collecting the taxes.¹¹⁸ However, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, due to external and internal conflicts, the region endured a greater lack of a centralized authority. This vulnerability of the state structure resulted with the emergence of new local powers. Two Kurdish mirs, Muhammed of Rewandiz and Bedirhan, rebelled against the state and the latter became a crucial symbol for the Kurdish community.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, (London: Zed Books, 1992), 175-176.

¹¹⁷ Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 59.

¹¹⁸ Hamit Bozarslan, *The Cambridge History of the Kurds*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 60.

¹¹⁹ Bruinessen, 177.

Bedirhan was the emirate of Botan tribe in the early nineteenth century. He took over the tribe in 1821, his first action was to consolidate Kurdish emirates that were scattered across the region.¹²⁰ After consolidating his power as the new emirate of the Kurdish confederation, Bedirhan controlled the region between Diyarbekir and Mosul. Later, he created a statelike system where he appointed his own men to local administrative posts.¹²¹ During this period, he possessed a substantial degree of autonomy and authority in the region. In 1820s and 1830s, Bedirhan's influence grew to the point that he issued coins in his name as a declaration of his independence.¹²² In the corresponding years, he refused to send troops for the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828-29, which was another major sign of his growing autonomy as a provincial power.¹²³ However, nearly after a decade. Ottoman rule began to implement its centralization policies in Kurdistan, after the pacification of Anatolian tribes. Rashid Pasha, a renowned statesman, started successful military campaigns against Bedirhan and took over Cizre, capital of the mir.¹²⁴ While Bedirhan retreated to mountains, only after a year the forces of Ibrahim Pasha reached Kurdistan to weaken the central authority ones again. Eventually, the last Kurdish emirate of the region ended with the external pressure received from the Great Powers. The massacres of local Christian population by the mir 'forces became an international concern. After this incident in 1847, Ottoman forces captured and exiled Bedirhan along with his household.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 57.

¹²¹ Özoğlu, 60.

¹²² Kasaba, 90.

¹²³ Bruinessen, 179.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Klein, 58.

2.2.1 Implementation of Tanzimat Reforms in Kurdistan

Left only with abandoned villages, Eastern provinces of the empire was extremely impoverished. Numerous districts were deserted due to prevailing nomadic lifestyle in the region. Constant raids targeted the settled population, neither the central government nor regional authorities were able to prevent these attacks. Travelers of the period, surprised by the region's miserable state, depicted this vast area as an idle but potentially fertile land.¹²⁶ Aware of these circumstances, Ottoman central government initially pursued policies to strengthen its authority in the region. Subsequently, the modernization efforts of Tanzimat era, resulted in notable changes within provinces, started being implemented in these frontier regions.¹²⁷ In the first half of the nineteenth century, a campaign launched against the provincial governors who enjoyed significant level of autonomy. Later, the semi-independent Kurdish emirates dominating the Eastern lands were the next target of the state, until their dissolution in late 1840s. Following the termination of Bedirhan's emirate, a new administrative center named Kurdistan was established to maintain the political security in the region. Grand vizier of the time proposed the initial plan for the area. In his letter detailing the current situation in the region, vizier emphasized the success of Ottoman authorities against the local bandits and referred the successful campaigns as reconquering the region. New administrative structure of grand vizier approved by the sultan and in 1847 Kurdistan Province comprising the Van, Mus, Mardin, Diyarbakir and Hakkari districts established across a wide area.¹²⁸ This

¹²⁶ Norman Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800-1980*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987),12.

¹²⁷ To see a detailed example: Yonca Köksal Özyaşar, *The Ottoman Empire in the Tanzimat Era Provincial Perspectives from Ankara to Edirne*, (New York: Routledge, 2019).

¹²⁸ Özoğlu, 60-63.

regulation aimed to ensure and maintain the direct authority in the region through governors or district governors appointed by the Ottoman Empire.

Throughout the Tanzimat era, the state introduced new regulations, several were particularly targeted the nomadic population in provinces. One crucial regulation concerning the land ownership introduced in 1858. The new Land Code (*Arazi Kanunnamesi*) required individuals to officially register the lands they cultivate under their name. After this regulation, unregistered land meant an area under the ownership of the state.¹²⁹ With this practice, by reclaiming the lands, state targeted nomadic communities utilizing different regions each season. For the central government, registration meant population control through censuses which would lead to an increase in tax revenues. Thus, government aimed to promote sedentary lifestyle by limiting the tribal movement. However, this step taken against nomadism would not yield the desired results in practice.¹³⁰ The Land Code resulted with an intense individualized economy in Kurdistan and Arab lands, creating even more powerful lords within the region. Local population feared of increased taxes and conscription registered their lands on tribal leaders or urban elites, becoming only sharecroppers on the land.¹³¹ On the other hand, the summer or winter residence of the tribes now officially considered empty, reclaimed by the sultan, and refugee households settled on these lands. Consequently, conflict between new comers and tribes in these regions was intensified during this era.¹³² As a result, despite the unanticipated results of the land code, state asserted its authority on land system

¹²⁹ Kasaba, 103.

¹³⁰ Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*, 18, 54.

¹³¹ Bruinessen, 184.

¹³² Kasaba, 102.

and applied new strategies like creating settled refugee communities in provinces to restrict tribal movement.

The Provincial Law of 1864, initially practiced in the Balkans, later implemented in eastern provinces, was another reform crucial for the region's integration to Ottoman rule. Under this law, Kurdistan transformed officially into Diyarbekir Province in 1867. The new administrative system granted greater authority to governors. Concurrently, central government increased the control over provincial officials with an intend to consolidate their power on local population, especially on notables, and groups that were difficult to perform conscription and tax collection.¹³³ Moreover, Sublime Porte redefined the territorial extent of the provinces with a constricting administrative structure. State considered that low number of districts along with reduced populations would facilitate the direct rule of the governors.¹³⁴ Indeed, the creation of Zor Province was one implication of this new policy. Centralization policies of the state further intensified in late 1860s, especially targeted the desert region surrounding the eastern provinces. Arslan Pasha given the privilege of establishing Zor, with Deyr as its center, to implement policies with efficiency. Several government buildings established in the region to ensure the security. These efforts followed by promoting commercial activities through inviting merchants from Mosul and Aleppo.¹³⁵ However, not only officials of Zor but also the governors of neighboring provinces had concerns over the desert the region. Several renowned statesmen were appointed as governor of Aleppo and Bagdad at the time like Ahmed Cevdet and Midhad Pashas. By cooperating with each other these

¹³³ Klein, 60.

¹³⁴ Mustafa Gençoğlu, "1864 ve 1871 Vilâyet Nizamnamelerine Göre Osmanlı Taşra İdaresinde Yeniden Yapılanma", *Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 2(1), 34.

¹³⁵ Bostan, "Zor Layiha", 171.

governors, who were given greater authorities to improve the region, aimed to ensure the security of the inner desert. Ahmed Cevdet, governor of Aleppo and Muhammed Rashid, governor of Damascus, met in 1866 and signed an agreement to deploy a special unit within the desert region. Another renowned statesman, Midhat Pasha, the governor of Baghdad, further assigned military units along the Euphrates to ensure the security of Aleppo-Baghdad route.¹³⁶

The first governor of newly established Diyarbekir Province, Ismail Hakkı Pasha, similar to his counterparts, assumed administrative responsibility of the desert region. One of his initial concern was to restore the area to its former glory of medieval times. Adapting the same political stance with his fellow governors, Ismail deemed the nomadic practices of the local population as the primary obstacle to perform necessary reforms. Diyarbekir journal, the weekly official newspaper initiated by governor Ismail, reveals the official view on local tribes of the desert area along with governance's justification for implementing these reforms.¹³⁷ Particularly, the first article of the fourteenth issue dated from November 1869, focuses solely on local population, their impact on the region and possible policies to improve unfavorable conditions of desert area. Opening part of the article focuses on the central factors contributed to primitive conditions of the region. Prosperity of a land was equated with the affection of one's homeland, and the communities loved their homeland were expected to become civilized. According to provincial governors only this level of love could lead to a civilized and prosperous region. Consequently, for the ruling elites, the desert region owed its backward state to nomadic tribes

¹³⁶ Lewis, 29-30.

¹³⁷ Diyarbekir Gazetesi, 4 November 1869, no. 14, 2.

predominantly engaged in plunder and merely performed limited agricultural and commercial activities.¹³⁸ One excerpt from the article further states the officials' view on respective tribes;

Although these desert regions, where first civilizations appeared in the world, are more suitable for agriculture and settlement than anywhere else even today. They remained in the hands of the tribes, and since these tribes were too ignorant to have love for the homeland (*lezzet-i muhabbet-i vatan*), these regions were completely ruined and destroyed by them. Not even the ruins of previous civilizations are remaining today. Now, the same buildings have become the nests of owls and crows.¹³⁹

The excerpt depicts the nomadic tribes as the sole reason of the idle conditions in desert area. While love for the homeland regarded as a crucial source of motivation that enabled individuals to contribute towards society, nomadic tribes portrayed as lacking this attitude. Hence, tribes' lack of involvement in settled lifestyle and commercial activities interpreted as an indicator of disdain towards the empire. Consequently, this primitive life, pursued by nomadic tribes was an obstacle preventing the development of the desert region. On the other hand, government justifies these views by emphasizing the ancient civilizations emerged within the same area. In parallel with numerous reports written on the region, the area depicted as a fertile land with vast plains suitable for cultivation, referencing the previous civilizations thrived in these lands. However, unlike these ancient civilizations tribes were unable to benefit from natural sources of the region, due to their nomadic practices. Thus, as perceived by the central authority, under the influence of semi-autonomous powers, desert region had been unable to reach its potential. Recent

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

reforms and policies aimed at the sedentarization process of these nomadic tribes further promoted by governors of eastern province through the same narrative.

In conclusion, Ottoman authority in Kurdistan region was greatly weakened by the nineteenth century. During this period, provincial governors and local tribal leaders gained considerable authority to control certain regions with their excessive autonomy. Along with political turmoils socioeconomic situation of the region was extremely impoverished. Local population have abandoned their villages due to plunder, and the region entirely dominated by semi-nomadic tribes. However, in 1840s, the state pursued policies to re-establish central authority in the region, especially by implementing the Tanzimat reforms. Initially, the uncultivated lands used by tribes as pastures reclaimed with the new land code. Later, the new provincial system enabled governors to exercise greater control over the regions. Accordingly, central government appointed competent governors with excessive powers to ensure stability and security in the region. Several governors had concerns on desert region and its nomadic tribes. They cooperated against the common threat with a common ideal, to revive the former prosperity of the desert.

Before the refugee settlements, Ra's al-'Ayn region administratively consisted of several communes constitute as pasture lands for regional tribes. In particular, after the centralization policies of the Ottoman government initiated through military campaigns, precisely targeting the Kurdish and Bedouin tribes, Ra's al-'Ayn, situated in the edge of the desert area, turned into a strategic center to implement state policies. By the 1840s, state pacified prominent leaders like Bedirhan and introduced several policies to ensure its lasting authority over the region. The most vital strategy

for achieving state control in this area was the establishment of sedentary lifestyle. For the state, settlement of local forces would result with cultivation of fertile lands, increase in tax revenues, end of plundering and new trade routes in a secure environment. On the other hand, tribes maintained a semi-independent life for centuries and had no desire to be bound to the land, pay excessive taxes or drafted into the military. They even avoided the policies implemented by the state for these purposes. However, the sultan reclaimed the lands used as pasture by introducing a new land code and regions without proper title deeds considered as vacant. Consequently, refugee settlements situated within this region to recapture the lands and promote the settled lifestyle. With this policy, Chechen refugees regarded as potentially loyal citizens of the state and their settlements established as a barrier against the groups deemed as hostile to the central authority.

2.3 Chechen Settlements in Ra's al-'Ayn

Following the defeat of Sheyh Shamil in 1859, Caucasian migration intensified towards the Ottoman lands. Even though, large numbers of refugee settlements initially established in Balkans and Anatolia, few groups arrived in eastern provinces. In early 1860s, one of the earliest and largest refugee settlements built in Ra's al-'Ayn with 5000 Chechen inhabitants.¹⁴⁰ Despite all the remaining vacant lands suitable for communal settlement in inner Anatolia, establishing a settlement of this magnitude at once within a remote corner, undoubtedly was related to centralization policies initiated in the region during the same period. After pacified the regional powers through military campaigns, state aimed to establish large-scale refugee settlements

¹⁴⁰ Lewis, 97.

in the region to encourage or even force sedentary lifestyle upon nomadic population. Since the government reclaimed the pasture lands of nomadic tribes with the new land code, newly established refugee settlements became an area of disputed land ownership. This challenging situation in the region required resilient communities that can endure against the threats of local forces. In the view of the Ottoman government Chechens were the ideal group to stand against these challenging conditions. One report written during the settlement process of Chechens, reveals the Ottoman perception on this refugee group. In the telegram dated from 1865, officials required additional assistance with Chechen refugees held in transit locations. They explicitly stated concerns of potential adverse events in the district owing to Chechens' aggressive and hostile nature.¹⁴¹ Thus, state strategically settled Chechen refugees to this remote area against the nomadic tribes due to their combative character.

For the settlement process of Chechens, another crucial factor was the influence of external forces. In particular, Russian officials frequently interfered with Ottoman authorities to ensure the settlement plans were compatible with their own interests. Russia's primary concern was the prevention of Caucasian, in several regions particularly Chechen, settlements in Ottoman eastern provinces near the Russian border. Consequently, vast majority of the refugees settled in the Balkans and inner Anatolia. However, in several occasions Ottoman and Russian authorities had further disputes concerning the Chechen settlements. In early 1860s a large group of Chechen refugees settled within the Erzurum Province near the Van Lake. Despite its close proximity to Diyarbakir Province, Russian authorities strongly

¹⁴¹ BOA, A. MKT. MHM 339/13 in Ünal, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkas Göçleri I*, 362-364.

opposed to this plan. For the Russians, especially the Chechen community constituted a greater threat when compared to other Caucasian groups. Indeed, after negotiations Chechens decided to be send far western regions like Ra's al-'Ayn and Konya, while Dagestanis and Circassians remained in the region.¹⁴² Russian side was deeply concerned on this issue that even the previously agreed settlement areas caused disruption during the migration process. According to a report written in 1865, a Russian officer responsible for the refugee transfer, strongly opposed the settlement of Chechen refugees in the Mus and Van districts. He insisted on the relocation of Chechens to desert region situated in southwest of Diyarbekir Province. For this cause, officer even attempted to create dispute among refugees in an effort to persuade them to return the Russia instead of settling in the respective regions. The dispute resolved only after Ottoman side convinced the officer that these regions are considerably farther from the border and closer to Diyarbekir.¹⁴³ Thus, the Ottoman government had limited areas to settle Chechen population. Especially, the settlements within eastern parts of the empire actively monitored by the Russia. This resulted with the creation of new settlements in desert regions like Ra's al-'Ayn. However, for the Ottoman side every obstacle presented new opportunities. With the policy of making optimal use of refugee groups, a settlement consisting only of Chechens established in Ra's al-'Ayn, against the unruly forces of the region.

The settlement process of refugees consisted several stages. Initially, refugee groups would arrive in port cities and later allocated to their final destinations or settled temporarily within the port cities. This process was highly depended on the

¹⁴² Avagyan, 46-48.

¹⁴³ BOA, A. MKT. MHM, 341/27.

seasonal conditions. During the harsh winters refugees would spend the season in transit locations due to lack of efficient transportation systems. In October 1865, due to approaching winter, four thousand Chechen refugee households marching to settle in Kurdistan region, temporarily settled in Kapakcur district located in northern Diyarbekir.¹⁴⁴ On the other hand, after enduring harsh conditions of migration process, reaching to final settlements was of primary importance for some refugee families. Since the chief occupation among refugee households was agriculture, catching the cultivation season was essential to ensure their economic stability. Likewise, in January 1861, a group of five hundred Chechen households temporarily settled in port city of Samsun to spend the winter. The leader of the tribe wrote a petition stating their desire to advance towards their permanent settlement without any delay to catch up with the planting season.¹⁴⁵ This request accepted by the officials in port city and the respective provincial governor was notified of refugee arrival. Ottoman officials organized the migration process based on seasonal conditions, preferring refugees to settle temporarily during the harsh winter season. However, some refugee groups were willing to arrive their new homeland under any condition, due to economic concerns. In response, officials considered the refugee preferences and acted flexible in placing the refugee groups. With regard to migration routes, arriving in Ra's al-'Ayn region depended both on the seasonal conditions and refugee preferences. While port cities constitute the initial destination, refugees used land routes to reach their final destinations. Under severe conditions blocking the passage ways, groups temporarily settled on empty lands in transit areas, particularly to spend winters.

¹⁴⁴ BOA, MVL. 714/52.

¹⁴⁵ BOA, A. MKT. MHM, 206/60, in Ünal, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkas Göçleri I*, 313-315.

After the lengthy journeys, Chechen refugees started to arrive in Ra's al-'Ayn region during the early 1860s. Following the first Chechen settlement with 5000 inhabitants, a new refugee group consisted of 1200 households further settled in Ra's al-'Ayn.¹⁴⁶ During the first years of the new settlement numerous refugee groups allocated within the region, particularly with high numbers. In 1868, British consul Taylor states the Ottoman government's recent efforts to populate the Ra's al-'Ayn district through Chechen refugees. During his visit Taylor witnesses changing aspect of the desert region. He depicts the new fort and barracks the state built to protect the refugees from local tribes.¹⁴⁷ Within the same year Ra's al-'Ayn welcomed another Chechen group consisted 2500 individuals.¹⁴⁸ Two factors contributed to the high number and frequency of these refugee settlements. One was due to the defeat of Shamil in 1859, refugee flow in the subsequent decade was in its peak and resulted with numerous new settlements established within the region. Other was the state's policy to settle refugees with their relatives. Since the Ra's al-'Ayn region was prone to attacks of Bedouin and Kurdish tribes, state aimed to populate the district as much as possible and strategically settle other Chechen groups against this threat. In May 1866, Chechen refugee groups temporarily settled in Erzurum province ordered to allocate in Ra's al-'Ayn near their relatives.¹⁴⁹ By placing tribes with kinship in close proximities, the state aimed to enable refugee groups to establish a strong community that can unite against the possible threats. At the same time, for the successful establishment and integration of early settlements, authorities constructed military facilities in the region.

¹⁴⁶ Avagyan, 64.

¹⁴⁷ Taylor, 346.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ BOA, A. MKT. MHM, 356/31.

The first years of Chechen settlement in Ra's al-'Ayn region proceeded without difficulty, numerous groups were ready to settle in this remote area. However, the first official concerns on this new district directed from the British consulate residing in Diyarbekir Province. The report written in 1867 detailed the current situation of Ra's al-'Ayn, particularly the refugee settlements. For the consulate, the essential issue was the lack of financial support on the reconstruction of lands surrounding Khabur River. Even though, in previous years, a considerable amount allocated in the region to support the first settlements, recently funds were withdrawn resulting in failed projects. With no financial assistance, the region would likely to suffer from poverty, potentially leading to banditry activities by Chechen refugees. After stating these concerns, British consulate ended the report with his suggestions on positioning extensive military forces in the region.¹⁵⁰ Certainly, the financial assistance provided to refugee communities was crucial for their survival in the new lands. Refugees would arrive in their final destinations even without necessary tools for cultivation. Consequently, they depended entirely on state support for establishing their settlements. Indeed, just after several years, in 1868, two Chechen tribes, recently settled in Ra's al-'Ayn requested for a permission to return Russia, due to lack of financial aid.¹⁵¹ During the same year, several reports written to provincial governors, detailing the unruly behaviors of Chechen refugees. Particularly, thefts and raids committed by armed Chechens reported with great concern.¹⁵² Thus, just like the consulate anticipated, amidst the first decade of settlement, issues began to emerge in the region.

¹⁵⁰ BOA, MVL. 739/50.

¹⁵¹ BOA, MKT. MHM. 426/54.

¹⁵² BOA, MKT. MHM, 428/78.

In conclusion, the government launched its campaigns to reclaim the desert areas, including the Ra's al-'Ayn region, in the second half of the nineteenth century. Paralleled with this period, the Caucasian communities lost their struggle against Russia and the migration flow into the Ottoman lands reached its peak. Although, the first refugee settlements established in the Balkans and Anatolia, several settlements built in far edges of the empire like Ra's al-'Ayn. Both internal and external factors contributed to this decision. Particularly, the Russian pressure on settlement process limited the Ottoman flexibility in land allocation for refugees. Consequently, Chechen communities, specifically settled in Ra's al-'Ayn district for its distance from Russian border and its close proximity to semiautonomous tribes of the desert. Chechens, known for their combatant characteristics, regarded as equivalent to regional powers. This led to the Ottoman policy of creating loyal communities through refugee settlements, particularly against the tribes labeled as disruptive. This strategy, implemented in parallel with the centralization policies of the period, constituted as an effective plan for the state, at least in principle. However, first issues arose within the initial phases of refugee settlements, particularly due to financial difficulties of the inhabitants. Preceding to Hamidian era, despite the policies implemented in the Ra's al-'Ayn and surrounding desert lands, achieving central authority in the region remained far from reach.

3 Life in the Desert: Refugees, Tribes and Empire

As discussed in the second chapter, several thousand Chechen refugees were settled in the Ra's al-'Ayn region to create loyal subjects against the nomadic tribes. This chapter will explore how the regional conditions and imperial policies affected these refugee settlements. The Hamidian era, a pivotal period in this narrative, will be the main focus. The first part will identify the settlement situation within the first decades. After discussing the unfavourable conditions of this remote region situated near the eastern desert, the subsequent part will delve into the intriguing Hamidian policies employed in the area. I will situate his objectives along with the broader imperial policies of the era. Additionally, this part traces the possible impacts of imperial policies on turning Chechen refugees into prominent bandits of the region. In the last part, I will explore the surviving strategies of Ra's al-'Ayn Chechens, particularly focusing on their banditry activities, regional alliances and kinship networks.

3.1 First Decades of Refugee Settlements in Ra's al-'Ayn (1860-1876)

Mustafa Pasha, the governor of Kurdistan Province, reported that the desert side was the only suitable region to settle Chechen refugees en masse due to their stubborn nature and large population.¹⁵³ As previously noted in the second chapter, Ra's al-'Ayn region was prone to conflict since the vacant lands populated with refugees was used as pasture land by local tribes. Accordingly, the Ottoman state perceived the Chechens as an adequately capable community to possibly resist

¹⁵³ Saydam, *Kırım ve Kafkas Göçleri*, 148.

these groups. For the state, the promotion of sedentary lifestyle would expand through these loyal Chechen refugee subjects in Ra's al-'Ayn. However, within the first years of settlement, thousands of Chechens began encountering severe difficulties in their new homeland. In parallel with the concerns of the British consul, the first problems emerged in 1870, after the provincial government's failure to provide sufficient aid to new refugee settlements. The government support allocated to refugees ceased suddenly after the first harvest season, and many families struggling with financial burdens left the region. Arslan Pasha (1870-1871), governor of Zor, states in his report the consequences of this policy on the refugee population. The initial settlements comprised 14.000 Chechen refugees, but their population dropped to 4.000 due to the lack of financial support in subsequent years.¹⁵⁴ Written by the region's renowned governor, this report greatly impacted the central government. To prevent refugee departures, the state planned to provide an emergency aid package for the Chechens in 1871. Based on this aid program, Chechens would receive tons of wheat to facilitate their agricultural activities; the loan repayment would start in instalments after a one-year delay.¹⁵⁵ As the above reports illustrate, Chechen refugees were not even able to properly establish, let alone maintain, their new settlements. The aim and expectation of the state was to create sedentary communities harvesting fertile lands, but contrary to these expectations, refugees started to leave the region due to harvest failures and financial difficulties.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 160.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 160-161.

Over the ensuing years, circumstances deteriorated further for Chechen refugees. In 1873, officials inspected the settlements to obtain the first instalment of the aid loan. They found that Chechens could not get the desired yield from previous harvests due to locust invasion and droughts. However, challenges in cultivation only depicted one aspect of the difficulties refugees encountered. During the last years, settlements were struck by the cholera epidemic, which wiped out half of the population. Under these adverse conditions, the Chechens, despite their hardships, could not make instalment payments, and their debt postponed.¹⁵⁶ Although the Ra's al-'Ayn region, situated along the fertile soils of Khabur River, it had several unfavourable characteristics. The district was prone to swamps and malaria since the existing springs had irregular patterns of overflow and depletion.¹⁵⁷ The government, in a display of neglect, overlooked these challenges. The Ra's al-'Ayn region was populated with refugees without proper examination and improvement. The inadequate assessment of land suitability for settlement created unanticipated problems for the refugee communities. After encountering significant obstacles in adapting to these adverse conditions of the region, numerous Chechen groups either fled to other provinces or returned to Russia.

Despite the dramatic decline of the refugee population, the state had concerns over the education of remaining refugee groups. In alignment with the Tanzimat reforms, authorities sought to discipline the populace through education, particularly the refugees. Initially, state-sponsored education reached the provincial level after The Regulation of Public Education (*Maarif-i Umûmiye Nizamnâmesi*) was

¹⁵⁶ BOA, ŞD. 2213/48.

¹⁵⁷ Taylor, 348; Gökalp, 92-93.

published in 1869.¹⁵⁸ Under this regulation, the new *rüşdiyye* (secondary) schools began to replace the old madrasa system and represented the highest level of education in the provinces until 1880.¹⁵⁹ This regulation required the establishment of a *rüşdiyye* in towns with at least five hundred households.¹⁶⁰ Despite the declining number of refugees, the population of Ra's al-'Ayn comprised of villages with several hundreds inhabitants. Consequently, within the new law's scope, an order was issued to establish a *rüşdiyye* in Ra's al-'Ayn district in July 1874, appointing Abdulvehab Efendi, a refugee from the settlement, as its tutor.¹⁶¹ The implementation of the order is evident from a document issued a year later, concerning the pilgrimage permission of tutor Abdulvehab Efendi. By delegating his teaching duties to Abdusselam Efendi, the head tutor asked permission to perform a pilgrimage, and his request was accepted.¹⁶² Appointing local figures as tutors was a widespread practice in provinces. While according to regulation, state preferred appointing teachers with professional qualifications, the lack of trained teachers necessitated the appointment of local figures as tutors.¹⁶³ This was indeed the situation for Ra's al-'Ayn and for many other refugee settlements. In most cases, refugees were responsible for the education of their communities. Thus, the first school to educate Chechen male refugee children built in Safh village within the Ra's al-'Ayn district. Amid the regional adversities, the state's commitment to education,

¹⁵⁸ Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education*, 83.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 65.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 112.

¹⁶¹ BOA, MF. İBT. 4/97.

¹⁶² BOA, MF. İBT. 6/104.

¹⁶³ Somel, 123-124.

was a testament to their dedication to the welfare of the refugee communities in this area.

Chechen refugees were challenged with severe conditions in the first decade of their lives in this remote region. The state's plan of achieving prosperity through refugee settlements in the fertile lands around the Khabur River, encountered crucial setbacks in this decade. Refugees suffered drought and malaria due to rough climate conditions and further endured epidemic diseases like cholera. These unfavourable conditions, which were beyond their control, prevented Chechens from yielding crops and resulted in their poor state. In response to this dire situation, the state continued to assist refugees with aids and remitted their debts. Along with this financial assistance, a state school was established for refugee children. Thus, authorities maintained their belief in transforming Ra's al-'Ayn into a prosperous centre and continued supporting the refugees until the reign of Abdulhamid II.

3.1.1 Chechen Refugee Settlements in the Hamidian Era (1876-1909)

Due to the terrible environmental conditions in the Ra's al-'Ayn district, Chechen refugees have suffered significant losses so far. While it is deeply regrettable that these refugees have endured so much due to the dire conditions at their current location, it is inappropriate for them to remain there under these circumstances.¹⁶⁴

Ottoman officials wrote the above statements in response to Chechen refugee petitions wishing to relocate from Ra's al-'Ayn in 1890. This report, produced in the Hamidian Era, reveals how refugees continued to experience similar issues in this

¹⁶⁴ BOA, DH. MKT, 1778/59 in Unal, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkas Göçleri II*, 338-339.

remote region, even after thirty years of residence. Chechen refugees, exhausted from this poor situation, demanded to be settled in a suitable place. Unlike in previous decades, the state realized the region's rehabilitation was impossible and regretted settling refugees in these lands. These statements efficiently demonstrate the Hamidian Era policies implemented in the refugee settlements of Ra's al-'Ayn. Accordingly, during the Hamidian period, the state dispatched no additional refugee groups to the district, allocated no investments, and supported the groups that desired to relocate. It is crucial to note the state's role in this process, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the Ottoman policies and their impact on the refugee settlements.

The defeat of the 1877-78 Russian-Ottoman war, which erupted just one year after Abdulhamid II ascended to the throne, sparked new mass migration movements towards Ottoman lands. The Caucasian communities previously settled in the Balkans, along with Rumelian Muslims, began to migrate to Anatolia.¹⁶⁵ Since refugee groups, particularly the Caucasians were tribes with large populations, they required vast empty lands to settle. However, due to previous refugee settlements, Anatolian lands lacked suitable sites for new settlements.¹⁶⁶ As an alternative, the state started to construct settlements in Arab lands, especially within the provinces of Syria and Aleppo.¹⁶⁷ However, despite these new migration flows and the scarcity of suitable land, no new groups were sent to the Ras al-'Ayn region. Even in the subsequent decades, neither the state nor refugees requested to establish new

¹⁶⁵ Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler*, 184.

¹⁶⁶ Habiçoğlu, 153-155.

¹⁶⁷ Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers*, 98.

settlements in this region. The primary reason was the chronic environmental issues that hindered refugees from establishing a self-sufficient settlement even after decades. On the other hand, several refugee groups in Ra's al-'Ayn requested to be resettled to places suitable for inhabitation. Hacı Eyüp Efendi and Hamza Bey, the representatives of the Dagestani refugees settled in Ra's al-'Ayn two decades ago, demanded to be settled in the Mosul Province, stating that they could not adapt to the environment of the region, most of their households were scattered around, and the remaining hundred residents caught up with illnesses.¹⁶⁸ Since the state already acknowledged the unfavorable conditions of the district, authorities accepted the refugees' request to settle in Mosul Province. Thus, refugees' inability to create and maintain an agrarian community ended the narratives emphasizing the fertile soils surrounding the Khabur River. During the Hamidian Era, contrary to policies of the early 1860s, Ra's al-'Ayn was no longer regarded as a potentially fertile land where refugees could prosper and promote a sedentary lifestyle.

The reasons for this policy change originated from the ongoing struggle of remaining refugees of the district. Chechens further suffered from the region's sulphur reserves, locusts, droughts, and cholera. Two hot water springs within the Ra's al-'Ayn district were rich in sulphur. According to contemporary accounts, the sources of the Khabur River were considered moderately warm due to these sulphur reserves.¹⁶⁹ Bedouin groups extracted this sulphur with primitive sieving methods.¹⁷⁰ Even in the early stages of refugee resettlements, the income from the sulphur

¹⁶⁸ BOA, HH. THR, 465/2, in Unal, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkas Göçleri II*, 316-317.

¹⁶⁹ Bostan, 175; Cuinet, 288.

¹⁷⁰ Taylor, 349.

reserves was allocated for refugee relief funds.¹⁷¹ However, these reserves, expected to provide future benefits for the settlements, constituted significant risks for Chechen inhabitants. In 1888, a petition by Chechen refugees depicted the scale of destruction they experienced by the sulphur reserves. According to the petition, sulphur gases emanating from the Salur source near Ra's al-'Ayn resulted in countless fatalities, and the Chechen population declined from two thousand to two hundred households after twenty years of settlement.¹⁷² After the official inspection of the area, the state verified the detrimental effects of sulphur reserves, and Chechens relocated to another province. Additionally, just after a few years, cholera broke out in the region once again. The disease was so deadly that in seven hours, thirteen refugees died, and plenty more were infected in the district.¹⁷³ As evident from the reports, Chechen refugees continued to suffer from severe illnesses and droughts during the Hamidian Era. The government acknowledged the region's adverse conditions as a response to this crisis. The unfavourable climate of the area was the primary reason preventing the development of refugee settlements. The authorities solely focused on supporting refugees by providing additional assistance in their relocation process.

In conclusion, during the first decades of the Hamidian Era, Ra's al-'Ayn was a district with twenty-four villages¹⁷⁴ and a population of approximately eight thousand people, all of whom were Muslims.¹⁷⁵ The *rüşdiyye* school, established a

¹⁷¹ BOA, MKT. MHM. 367/62.

¹⁷² BOA, DH. MKT, 1778/59 in Unal, *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Kafkas Göçleri II*, 338-339.

¹⁷³ BOA, DH. MKT. 1770/6.

¹⁷⁴ Cuinet, 310.

¹⁷⁵ Karpal, *Ottoman Population*, 134.

decade ago, had fifteen students.¹⁷⁶ The local population was primarily engaged in limited agricultural production and animal husbandry, with sheep husbandry being the primary source of income.¹⁷⁷ Despite these economic activities, agricultural production and taxation of these products were so low that only the city of Medina paid less taxes than Zor.¹⁷⁸ According to these administrative figures, several groups still inhabited the region. However, during this period, state aid was ceased, and the policy of densely populating the refugee settlements, especially against the local tribes, was abandoned. As a result, contrary to the state's expectations, when Chechen refugees could not change the environment to suit their needs, they adapted to the region's conditions.

3.2 Refugees to Bandits: Adapting the Local Practices

...All the rest had perished owing to the fever-stricken climate of the headwaters region of the Khabur, or else had gradually worn away in the never-ending fights with the great Bedouin tribes that had pasture grounds in their neighborhood. The surviving Chechens had come to be much-dreaded sharpshooters and high waymen.¹⁷⁹

The opening sentences of German diplomat, Max von Oppenheim's (1899-1911) account of Chechen settlements in Ra's al-'Ayn, depict the new identities adopted by Chechen groups after thirty years of residence in the district. Oppenheim visited the region in 1899 in hopes of discovering an ancient site. He was informed of the

¹⁷⁶ Cuinet, 311.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Justin McCarthy, *Population History of the Middle East and the Balkans*, (Istanbul, The Isis Press, 2010), 197.

¹⁷⁹ Dr. Baron Max von Oppenheim, *Tell Halaf: A New Culture in Oldest Mesopotamia*, (London&New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), 6.

possible existence of a site Chechens accidentally uncovered years ago. When he arrived at Ra's al-'Ayn for more information Chechens were reluctant to discuss this matter, since they attributed their misfortunes to these ruins. However, determined to obtain information, Oppenheim invested considerable time in this refugee village. Consequently, he spent sufficient time to familiarize with local residents. According to him, the remaining two hundred households of Chechens in Ra's al-'Ayn were fierce bandits protected by Ibrahim Pasha, leader of the Milli Tribe.¹⁸⁰

Indeed, the remaining few Chechen refugee groups began to adapt to local culture to survive in the peripheries of the desert. After experiencing severe droughts and disasters, refugees could not find adequate resources to sustain themselves. Deficiencies in agricultural resources and limited access to animal husbandry were insufficient for refugees to cope effectively with the rough conditions of Ra's al-'Ayn. Thus, Chechens adjusted their attitudes to local customs of banditry as the British consul had predicted years earlier. Chechens of Ra's al-'Ayn, previously portrayed as refugees (*muhacir*), began to be described explicitly as bandits (*eşkiya*) in numerous state reports. The first document depicting Cheches as bandits reported in late 1880s. According to this report, provincial authorities of Mardin district requested the central government to initiate extensive precautions to prevent bandit attacks organized by Chechens of Ra's al-'Ayn.¹⁸¹ Following this incident, numerous reports continued to be written about the inappropriate behaviours of Chechens during the Hamidian regime.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ BOA, DH. MKT. 1548/45.

The refugee settlements established to create loyal subjects along the Khabur River evolved into bandits themselves, precisely the opposite direction as the government anticipated. The state had struggled to control the local tribes for centuries and now had to take measures against the Chechen bandits. Before the Hamidian Era, Ottoman forces had weakened the authority of tribes in desert areas. However, nomadism and plunder were still prevalent among the local communities. Bedouin tribes like Shammar continued to operate in the region, attacking urban centres and trade routes. In this complex landscape, the Chechens devised new strategies to sustain themselves. They adapted to regional customs, which the state perceived as threatening its regional authority. They sought to adjust to the regional power dynamics and formed strategic alliances with local tribes. Later, Chechens began to be associated with regional tribes by engaging in plundering and theft.¹⁸² Even several Chechens were transformed into famous bandits of the Ra's al-'Ayn region. Islam Bey was a Chechen bandit of Ra's al-'Ayn who protected criminals. Two fugitives from Mardin, wanted for harassing Ottoman soldiers, later took refuge in Ra's al-'Ayn under the renowned Chechen bandit Islam Bey.¹⁸³ Furthermore, a report detailing the banditry activities of Ra's al-'Ayn Chechens in 1892 depicts the extent of their power within the region. The group of Chechen bandits, encompassing a total number of hundred households, was reported as attacking the surrounding villages and harassing soldiers purchasing sheep in the town. Even though, bandits were captured and imprisoned, but their fellow Chechens raided the prison to rescue them.¹⁸⁴ These exceptional events led to the government's rigorous

¹⁸² BOA, DH. MKT. 1708/99.

¹⁸³ BOA, DH. MKT. 1765/119.

¹⁸⁴ Erdal Taşbaş, "Diyarbakır'da Çeçen Muhacirler ve Sebep Oldukları Asayiş Olayları", *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Diyarbakır*, (İstanbul: Ensar Nesriyat, 2018), 147.

precautions against the Chechen bandits. From then on, the government sought to relocate Chechens to other regions due to its inability to control Ra's al-'Ayn district. Initially, the state decided to disperse powerful Chechen bandits to Mamuratulaziz Province, particularly as single households, to prevent further banditry activities.¹⁸⁵ Through this exile practice, the state initially aimed to dismantle bandit groups. However, the long-term strategy was to depopulate the region as much as possible since controlling this remote area was challenging. Hence, initially, the Ottoman state tried to control Chechen bandits by measures of imprisonment. However, this was a failed attempt since the several bandit leaders attained a status akin to a Kurdish or Arab tribal leaders enjoyed a substantial autonomy. Consequently, exile methods, which applied to local tribal leaders for centuries, were implemented for the Chechen bandits and their households. Notably, by deporting the leaders to different areas, the government aimed to scatter the bandit groups and Chechen populations of Ra's al-'Ayn.

At the end of the nineteenth century, approximately forty years after the creation of Ra's al-'Ayn settlement, Chechen refugee groups adapted to the customs of the local region. They even began to be associated with regional tribes and labelled with them as bandits. Notably, despite their limited populace with few hundred households, they were empowered enough to occupy a central position alongside other regional powers. Chechens, the new notorious bandits of Ra's al-'Ayn, owed their power to the strategic alliances they established in the region. German diplomat Oppenheim states that the Chechens were loyal to Ibrahim Pasha, the renowned leader of the Milli tribe. This Kurdish leader became a pivotal figure in

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

the Hamidian regime. He was appointed as the head of Hamidiye Light Cavalries, which Abdulhamid II established to ensure regional security.¹⁸⁶ Through this role, within the regional power structures, the Milli tribe was given the privilege to act under the name of central authority. Due to Milli's authority in the region, in early 1900s, Chechens began to smuggle weapons for the tribe, to both generate income and strengthen their ties with them. Through these smuggling activities, Chechen bandits mobilized within the Arab lands and extended their banditry operations from Lebanon to Ra's al-'Ayn. In 1908, Chechens were reported hiding within the Syrian deserts with 600 weapons they brought from Lebanon; they intended to sell these weapons to the Milli tribe.¹⁸⁷ The state, determined to capture Chechen smugglers, sent special forces to desert sites. However, preventing Chechen banditry proved to be a challenging task.

¹⁸⁶ Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹⁸⁷ BOA, DH. ŞFR, 393/8 in Taşbaş, 149-150.



Slg. Oppenheim 29/16.32 S.73a

Figure 2: Chechens with members of Milli Tribe

in Tell Halaf archeological site, 1911.

Source: Oppenheim Collection, Rheinisch-Westfälische Wirtschaftarchiv.

(<http://www.arachne.uni-koeln.de/>)

An essential reason behind the state's incapability of preventing Chechen' banditry was their existing connections with regional security forces. While many Ra's al-'Ayn Chechens were associated with banditry, other Chechen groups were involved with duties in local gendarmeries. Especially during the Hamidian Era, while regional tribes were incorporated into the Hamidiye Regiments (*Hamidiye Alayları*), the state preferred to recruit Chechens and Circassians as local gendarmeries due to their mastery of horse riding.¹⁸⁸ Within the desert regions, Chechens were recruited as local forces against the Bedouin tribes. In 1878, 200 Chechens were recruited into the mobile battalion to prevent Bedouins' unruly behaviours in Zor Province. Likewise, an additional 50 mounted Chechens were employed to provide security against Arab bandits.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, in 1889, the state used a group of Chechens to serve in the military force prepared against the Shammar tribe to retrieve the goods they had seized from the surrounding tribes.¹⁹⁰ Thus, Chechen bandits had possible networks within regional authorities through their relatives or acquaintances. Benefiting from these connections, Chechens had potential advantages like regional protection and access to information on state measures through local gendarmeries. As a result, owing to these networks, the state had challenges in controlling the Chechen bandits.

With their declining numbers and weakening economic conditions throughout the Hamidan Era, Chechens sought new financial resources to survive in the desert

¹⁸⁸ BOA, Y.PRK. AZJ. 23/80 in Hakan Asan, "Devlet, Aşiret ve Eşkıya Bağlamında Osmanlı Muhacir İskân Siyaseti (1860-1914)", *Göç Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 3/2, 2016, 54.

¹⁸⁹ BOA, I.ŞD. 35/1765 in Hakan Asan, 51.

¹⁹⁰ BOA, DH. MKT. 1655/53 in Asan, 51.

region. Due to inadequate crop yields, Chechens began to adapt local practices to sustain their economy. They first engaged in looting practices across the region. Their authority gradually increased, and they became the prominent bandits of Ra's al-'Ayn. Chechens, who evolved into bandit leaders influential enough to provide refuge for fugitives, owed this status to their practical assessment of regional power hierarchies and ability to establish proper connections accordingly. They chose to engage in alliance with the Milli tribe due to their significant influence in the region, as it maintained the closest relations with the state. To tighten their relations and gain economic strength, Chechens even began to smuggle weapons across the Arab lands. In exchange for their alliances with Millis, they were protected against the Bedouin tribes of the region. On top of their links to local tribes, Ra's al-'Ayn Chechens had networks within regional security forces that enabled them to escape state control. In the end, despite their incapability of creating an agrarian society due to natural disasters or diseases, Chechens were able to sustain themselves through adopting local practices.



Slg. Oppenheim 29/15.4 S.1b

Figure 3: Mounted Chechens of Safh village, Ra's al-'Ayn, 1911.

Source: Oppenheim Collection, Rheinisch-Westfälische Wirtschaftarchiv.

3.3 End of a Dream: Ra's al-'Ayn in the Hamidian Era and Beyond

A few decades following the establishment of Chechen settlements in the region, during the Hamidian era the Ottoman policy of consolidating central authority through coercion was replaced by new strategies. While previous attempts weakened the authority of regional tribes through military force, Abdulhamid pursued inclusive policies to encourage Kurdish and Arab tribes to promote sedentary lifestyle, fulfil tax obligations, and participate in state-centered education.¹⁹¹ Two prominent institutions established by the Sultan, particularly for the desert region, were the Tribal School and Hamidiye Light Cavalries (*Hamidiye Alayları*).¹⁹² After the defeat in the Balkans, the Hamidian administration turned to the eastern and Arab lands to preserve the integrity of these remaining lands against nationalist ideologies. Accordingly, the state intensified its centralization efforts for these regions, especially with inclusive policies. Against the possible separatist movements of the Armenians in the eastern regions, Hamidiye Light Cavalries established entirely with Muslim Kurdish tribes. The state aimed to include tribes into the central political system and channel their power against a third party like Armenians. Established in 1890, the objectives of the Hamidian troops were to protect the frontier regions, suppress Armenian activities, and, most importantly, reintegrate the region into Ottoman territory.¹⁹³ Ibrahim Pasha, the leader of the Milli tribe, enjoyed the highest benefit of this policy by being appointed as the head of the Hamidiye Regiments, a position that not only elevated his status but also gave his tribe a

¹⁹¹ Nora Elizabeth Barakat, *Bedouin Bureaucrats: Mobility and Property in the Ottoman Empire*, (California, Stanford University Press, 2023).

¹⁹² Klein, 47.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

significant role in the central political system. His tribe grew into the dominating authority of the region with its affiliation to the Sultan. Later in 1892, the state opened a Tribal School, intending to disseminate this inclusive policy further. Although the school initially targeted the children of Arab tribes, later, it admitted children of Kurdish tribes.¹⁹⁴ This institution admitted numerous children from various provinces and also had students from Zor Province. Notably, the admission of Ahmet Cemil from the Milli tribe is noteworthy in demonstrating the multifaceted nature of inclusive politics.¹⁹⁵ Thus, during the Hamidian era, provinces gained significant importance due to the lost territories in the Balkan region. To prevent the same issues from emerging in the eastern regions, ideologies like Ottomanism and Islamism sought to spread within tribes dominating the region. Consequently, regional armed forces and schools emerged as crucial instruments for implementing these policies through inclusive methods.

When the Ra's al-'Ayn district and Chechen settlements are analyzed concerning Hamidian era policies, a distinctly different approach emerges than those adopted in other refugee settlements. While the state consistently implemented centralization policies through refugee mobilization in Arab lands, implementing these policies was discontinued for Ra's al-'Ayn. This region, situated on the edge of the desert, proved unsuitable for refugees to thrive and promote Ottoman policies against the local tribes. As a result, Chechens settled in Ra's al-'Ayn district with an intention to create loyal citizens, turned into bandits that state was unable to control.

¹⁹⁴ Bayram Kodaman, "Aşiret Mekteb-i Hümayunu," *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, (TDV İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 1991), 10.

¹⁹⁵ Eugene Rogan, "Aşiret Mektebi: Abdülhamid II's School for Tribes (1892-1907)", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1996, 90.

The Hamidian government, aware of these challenges, made a fateful decision. Instead of remediating the underlying factors that led to these problems, it began implementing policies to depopulate the region. This decision had significant implications. Forty years after establishing initial settlements in Ra's al-'Ayn, the district's population consisted of only 2500 inhabitants according to census of 1907¹⁹⁶, starkly contrasting the thriving communities in other regions. On the other hand, within the Zor Province, surrounding districts along the Euphrates River developed because of the expansion of a sedentary lifestyle with a total population of 40.000.¹⁹⁷ In addition to demographic statistics, the prevalence of schools can be considered an essential indicator of the presence of central authority, particularly in provinces. According to the following map demonstrating the schooling process in Urfa and Zor regions, red marks represent schools established until the end of the Hamidian Era, while the black ones indicate those opened after his reign.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Karpas, *Ottoman Population*, 166.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Matbaa-i Amire, No. 18-19, SALT Research, September 1914.

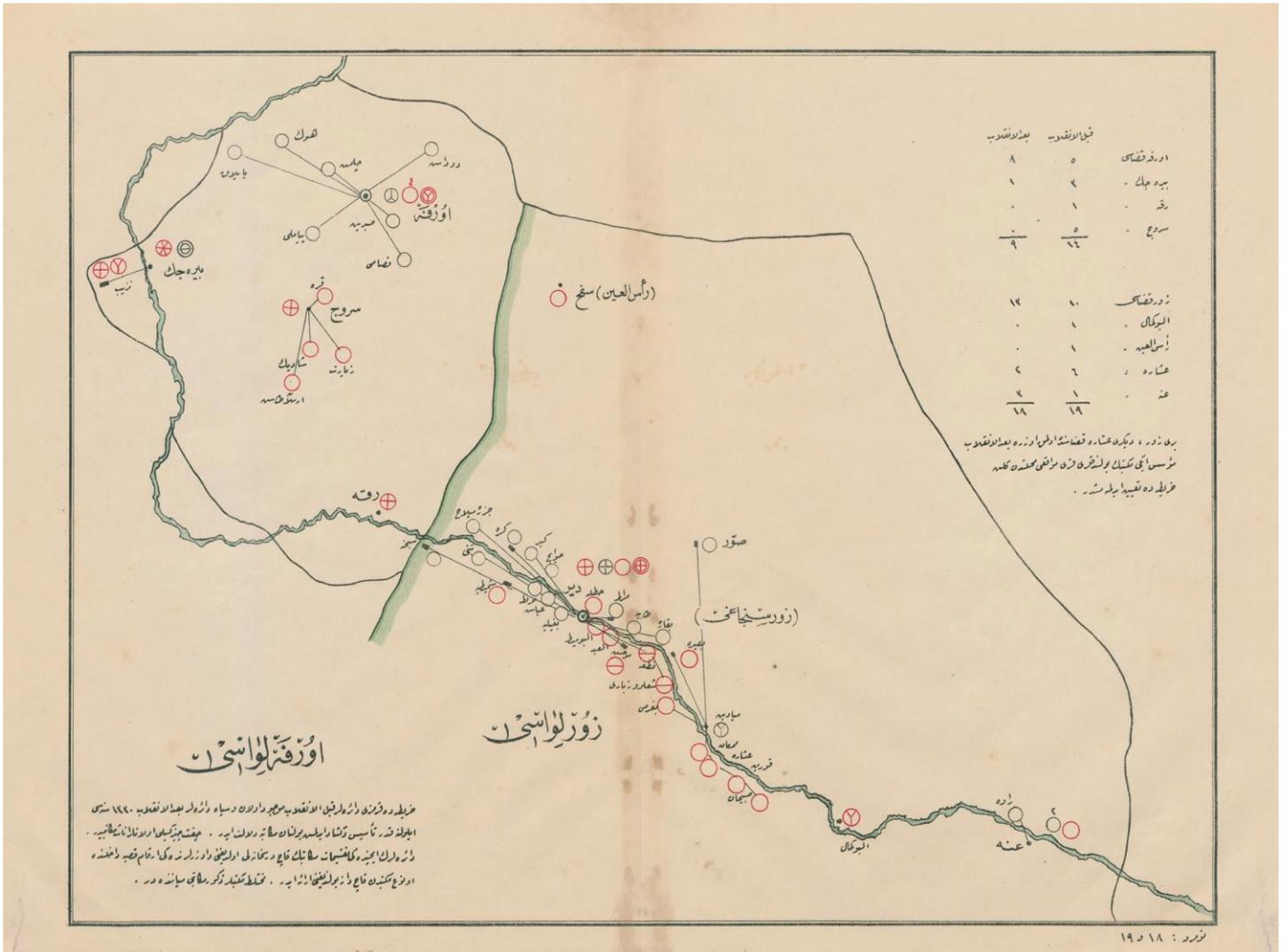


Figure 4: Schools of Urfa and Zor Provinces, 1914.
<https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/118970>

The map shows that the Urfa region on the west and Deyr district on the south enjoyed high schooling rates, while Ra's al-'Ayn had only one *rüşdiyye* established in Safh village in 1874.¹⁹⁹ This disparity was a direct result of the policy shifts of the Hamidian Era, which notably neglected the Chechen settlements of Ra's Al-'Ayn. The reasons for this neglect were multifaceted, including the region's remote location and lack of proper sedentary settlements engaged in agricultural production. Before

¹⁹⁹ Salnâme-i Nezaret-i Maarif-i Umumiyye, 1321/1903, 726.

this era, the region's refugee population had already begun to disperse due to droughts and diseases, and one *rüşdiyye* was considered sufficient for their sparse population. However, under the Hamidian regime, these issues were exacerbated as the population further declined, and the remaining groups turned to banditry. The region, including its educational institutions, was left without resources.



Slg. Oppenheim 29/15.4 S.2a

Figure 5: The only *Rüşdiyye* of Ra's al-'Ayn district located in Safh village with its Chechen students, 1911.

Source: Oppenheim Collection, Rheinisch-Westfälische Wirtschaftarchiv.

Hence, the policy to transform Ra's al-'Ayn district into an urban centre on the desert side could not be realized. Although the authorities aimed to impose central power on the remote regions controlled by tribes through reviving districts with refugee settlements, villages established along the Khabur encountered unexpected obstacles. Even though the fertile lands of this district differed from the inner desert side, the mere existence of fertile lands did not provide suitable conditions for proper agricultural activities. Since responsible authorities did not properly inspect the lands for refugee settlements, problems like drought and malaria prevalent in the region, were ignored. Ottoman bureaucrat Gökalp, who surveyed the area in 1921, highlights the danger of swamp regions arising from overflowing spring regimes and emphasizes the importance of the draining process before settling groups in the region.²⁰⁰ On the other hand, British diplomat Mark Sykes inspected the region in 1907 and noted how the refugees were vulnerable to the climate despite being skilled farmers and resilient fighters against the tribes. For him, this region was "not a country for white men to work in" due to its uncomfortably warm summers and malarial fevers.²⁰¹ Thus, Chechens could not sustain themselves under these harsh conditions while their fellow refugee groups established several prosperous settlements in the Syrian Province where both weather and state support were on their side.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Gökalp, 92-93.

²⁰¹ Mark Sykes, "Journeys in North Mesopotamia (Continued)", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1907, 394.

²⁰² For detailed accounts on Amman settlements see; Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*; Tronyanski, *Empire of Refugees*.

In conclusion, the Chechen settlements of Ra's al-'Ayn, created with high expectations in the fertile soils of the Khabur River began to disintegrate from the first years of their settlements. Ottoman state's neglect of assessing the land suitability for settlement and the lack of financial or political support resulted with the depopulation of the region. While many refugees migrated to surrounding areas, a small portion remained and adapted to local practices of looting and banditry. The new policies of the Hamidian era further reduced the support for refugees and aimed to encourage relocation. Consequently, the remaining refugees had to adjust the region's customs to sustain themselves. Eventually, they became prominent bandits and smugglers of Ra's al-'Ayn by forming advantageous alliances instrumental in their success. Although the state took many precautions against Chechens' disruptions of the public order, the group maintained its existence as a small band of brigands through plundering activities. After the Hamidian Era, Ra's al-'Ayn region continued to witness new tragedies, as it was turned into refugee camps in 1915 along with a desert side of Zor Province, where thousands of Armenians were deported from Anatolia.²⁰³ After the demise of the Ottoman Empire this district separated between the new post-Ottoman states of Türkiye and Syria, while the part in Syrian side still called as Ra's al-'Ayn the Turkish side named as Ceylanpınar.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Samuel Dolbee, "The Desert at the End of Empire: An Environmental History of the Armenian Genocide", *Past & Present*, Volume 247, Issue 1, May 2020.

²⁰⁴ Honigmann, 433.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I attempted to explore the effects of Hamidian era migration policies on refugee settlements. Due to mass migration movements towards the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth century, the state established numerous refugee settlements in Anatolia and Arab lands. While the building process of some settlements required only vacant lands suitable for populous refugee groups, several settlements were established with certain political motives. This thesis focused on one such refugee settlement named Ra's al-'Ayn, built with political concerns at the peripheries of the desert. Populated entirely with Chechen refugees, Ra's al-'Ayn district was founded primarily to consolidate central authority over semi-independent tribes of eastern deserts. As an area of implementing imperial policies, I focused on this particular district to grasp the nature of political motives pursued through refugee settlements and their influence on these communities. I concentrated on the Hamidian era since the empire reoriented its political focus towards Anatolian and Arab lands, particularly after the territorial losses in the Balkan region. During this period, centralization policies on eastern provinces accelerated, and the sultan employed new strategies to ensure the territorial integrity of these remaining lands. Furthermore, the latest migration wave from the Balkans ensured the continuation of the previous policies implemented via refugee settlements. To assess the influences of these policies on the refugee settlements, I followed the socio-political changes the Ra's al-'Ayn region has undergone over the decades. To examine this change, I focused on the migration policies of the Azizian and Hamidian eras concerning the Chechen refugee settlements of Ra's al-'Ayn. I explored the possible impacts of

imperial policies through primary sources like archival reports, state yearbooks and travel accounts containing information on the region.

The first chapter detailed the mass migrations towards the empire, emphasizing the policies addressing this issue throughout the nineteenth century. By revealing the mass scale of migration, the chapter presented the profound impact of these movements on the Ottoman lands. In the subsequent decades, refugee groups became integral in implementing imperial policies. The chapter identified imperial policies applied via refugee population and revealed that these central objectives concerning the refugee groups proceeded in alignment with the Tanzimat reforms. The state had two primary goals to fulfill through refugees; one was to populate the vacant lands, and the other was to supply personnel for military operations. However, a closer look revealed that across most areas, nomadic tribes used the lands deemed vacant by the state as their seasonal pastures. Despite this challenge, the empire strategically reclaimed the unregistered, non-taxable lands and promoted the sedentary lifestyle through refugee settlements. As emphasized in the chapter, these policies continued in the subsequent Hamidian era and even intensified in the eastern regions and Arab lands to create loyal populations against the Kurdish and Bedouin tribes. Additionally, while the Caucasian communities deployed in military campaigns, they were extensively employed as regional armed forces during the reign of Abdulhamid II. Refugee gendarmeries were responsible for ensuring the integrity of the territories that were inclined to establish separatist movements. Overall, the chapter depicted the state's general policies concerning refugee populations in the Azizian and Hamidian eras. It concluded that mass migrations had crucial impacts on implementing imperial policies and detailed how the Ottoman

Empire strategically instrumentalized refugee groups to implement these policies on provinces lacking central authority.

The second chapter uncovered the sociopolitical and demographic characteristics of the Ra's al-'Ayn region before the establishment of Chechen refugee settlements. It showed that Kurdish and Bedouin tribes dominated the region, particularly the lands surrounding the Khabur River were the pasture lands of these tribes. It also examined the perspective of Ottoman authorities on the region. Since this area hosted several ancient civilizations, the state attributed great potential to this remote area located on the periphery of the desert. According to travel accounts, Ra' al-'Ayn district was distinct from the desert area with its fertile lands, and state officials emphasized this feature to populate this region with loyal subjects to create a strategic base for operating its imperial policies within the greater desert region. While the empire defined local tribes as the primary obstacle to the region's development with their primitive and ignorant characteristics, Chechens, with their combatant characteristics, were regarded as the ideal population to implement the imperial policies on these nomadic tribes. The last section detailed the settlement process and the early experiences of Chechen refugees in the district. It revealed that, initially, thousands of refugees settled in the district without any challenges. However, in subsequent years, mainly due to financial problems, Chechens either scattered to other provinces or pursued criminal behaviours.

The third chapter delved into the Hamidian policies implemented in the Chechen settlements of Ra's al-'Ayn district. It began by focusing on the settlements'

first decades before the Hamidian era to depict previous policies and their influence on settlement welfare. This part showed that, unlike the empire's expectations, this region was prone to encounter environmental challenges like droughts and diseases. These unfavourable circumstances of the district challenged the Chechens, and they began to abandon the area. However, as the chapter emphasized, the state's policies of supporting the settlements through financial support were inadequate, leading to the Chechen departure from the area. Limited financial aid did not benefit the settlements since recurring issues like locust invasions and droughts prevented agricultural production. These challenges became chronic for the Chechens and continued in different forms like malaria and cholera, exhausting their population. This part concluded that deficiencies in assessing the land suitability for settlement led to unpredicted challenges for the Chechens. The state's response of focusing on temporary solutions instead of addressing the underlying factors of these adverse conditions was inefficient in preserving Ra's al-'Ayn's refugee settlements.

Concerning the Hamidian era, the chapter showed that the state abandoned previous policies that targeted the promotion of regional development. While other eastern and Arab provinces were populated with refugees from the Balkans, Ra's al-'Ayn was excluded from this practice. Instead, refugees were supported in their relocation process to surrounding provinces that proved suitable for habitation. Despite the presence of a few hundred households in the district, the state did not allocate any financial or political support for the Chechens, leaving them to fend for themselves. As a result of these new policies, Chechens of Ra's al-'Ayn pursued alternative ways to sustain their existence in the district. They observed the local customs and adapted to them. By engaging in plunder and theft, they assumed a new identity akin to that of local tribes and emerged as a threat to the settled

inhabitants of the surrounding towns. In the subsequent decades, the state witnessed the Chechen bandits' dominance of Ra's al-'Ayn. At the end of the Hamidian era, refugees transformed into bandit leaders, and they further strengthened their positions by forming alliances with regional powers.

In conclusion, these remarks demonstrate the crucial influences that imperial policies had on creating and maintaining refugee settlements. Ra's al-'Ayn region was perceived as an area with great potential with its fertile lands. However, the lack of a thorough inspection of the region resulted in profound challenges for the Chechens, and these conditions even worsened with the absence of state support in the Hamidian era. Consequently, Chechens employed local practices and became bandits of the region instead of the loyal subjects. Unlike the Ra's al-'Ayn region, several refugee settlements established with similar motives within the Province of Syria developed into places for implementing imperial policies. However, as this thesis revealed, the primary factors for a refugee settlement to prosper were the land's suitability for habitation and continued state support, whether economic or political. For the Ra's al-'Ayn district, both conditions were absent, and after the Hamidian era, it transformed into refugee camps for Armenian exiles.

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