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Between a Traumatic Past and an Uncertain Future: a study on the representations of the Ottoman defeat in the Balkan War (1912-1913)

Entre un pasado traumático y un futuro incierto: un estudio sobre las representaciones de la derrota otomana en la guerra de los Balcanes (1912-1913)

Entre um passado traumático e um futuro incerto: um estudo sobre as representações da derrota otomana na Guerra dos Balcãs (1912-1913)

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Abstract

The defeat in the Balkan War (1912-1913) was a critical moment for the Ottoman Empire. It was a traumatic event that challenged the established principles and projects and initiated a period of profound uncertainty regarding the future of the Empire. The article seeks to analyze some of the representations about the trauma of the defeat and the future of the Ottoman Empire through the editorials of an Ottoman newspaper, *La Jeune Turquie*, which was published in Paris during the conflict. The intention is not to present a detailed and comprehensive picture of the various narratives about the conflict but to assess some of the impasses about the event. More specifically, we seek to present the Balkan War as a liminal period. It was a traumatic experience that constituted a rearrangement of existing tendencies, unveiling new expectations for the future. The argument presented here is that more than a "point of no return," the defeat brought a new horizon of expectations on the Ottoman leaders.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire. Balkan Wars. Nationalism.

Resumen

La derrota en la Guerra de los Balcanes (1912-1913) fue un momento crítico para el Imperio Otomano. Fue un evento traumático que desafió los principios y proyectos establecidos e inició un período de profunda incertidumbre

sobre el futuro del Imperio. El artículo busca analizar algunas de las representaciones sobre el trauma de la derrota y el futuro del Imperio Otomano a través de las editoriales de un periódico otomano, La Jeune Turquie, que se publicó en París durante el conflicto. La intención no es presentar una imagen detallada y completa de las diversas narrativas sobre el conflicto, sino evaluar algunos de los impases sobre el evento. Más específicamente, buscamos presentar la Guerra de los Balcanes como un período liminal. Fue una experiencia traumática que constituyó un reordenamiento de las tendencias existentes, desvelando nuevas expectativas para el futuro. El argumento que aquí se presenta es que más que un "punto sin retorno", la derrota trajo un nuevo horizonte de expectativas a los líderes otomanos.

Palabras clave: Imperio Otomano. Guerras Balcánicas. Nacionalismo.

Resumo

A derrota na Guerra dos Balcãs (1912-1913) foi um momento crítico para o Império Otomano. Foi um evento traumático que desafiou os princípios e projetos estabelecidos e deu início a um período de profunda incerteza quanto ao futuro do Império. O artigo busca analisar algumas das representações sobre o trauma da derrota e o futuro do Império Otomano por meio dos editoriais de um jornal otomano, La Jeune Turquie, publicado em Paris durante o conflito. A intenção não é apresentar um quadro detalhado e abrangente das várias narrativas sobre o conflito, mas avaliar alguns dos impasses sobre o evento. Mais especificamente, procuramos apresentar a Guerra dos Balcãs como um período liminar. Foi uma experiência traumática que constituiu um rearranjo de tendências existentes, desvelando novas expectativas para o futuro. O argumento aqui apresentado é que mais do que um "ponto sem volta", a derrota trouxe um novo horizonte de expectativas para os líderes otomanos.

Palavras-chave: Império Otomano. Guerras Balcânicas. Nacionalismo.

Introduction

The Balkan War (1912-1913), a conflict that involved the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan League, was one of the main events that preceded the Great War. The conflict's outcome was disastrous for the Ottoman Empire, which lost most of the remaining territorial possessions on the European continent. The fighting broke out on October 8, 1912, with Montenegro's declaration of independence. The crisis deepened rapidly, and soon the other three states became involved in the conflict. On June 10, 1913, the London Treaty was signed, marking the end of the war between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan League (YOLCU, 2015). However, the conflict continued between Bulgaria and the other states over the division of the conquered territory. In this scenario, the Ottoman Empire had a brief involvement, regaining Adrianopolis's strategic city (Edirne) in July 1913 (YOLCU, 2015).

The Balkan War was a critical moment for the Ottoman Empire. It was a traumatic event that challenged the principles and projects hitherto in force and opened a period of profound uncertainty regarding the future of the Empire. The effects of the war were not limited to the Empire's international relations but also impacted its domestic politics. In January 1913, a coup d'état brought the Committee of Union and Prog-

ress (CUP) to power, imposing a one-party government and altering the political dynamics established with the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 (YOLCU, 2015). In this scenario, political leaders faced the challenge of reestablishing the principles that guaranteed the cohesion of the Ottoman political community, threatened by the emergence of new separatist movements and the aggressiveness of the Great Powers.

The Ottoman Empire's traditional historiography presents the defeat as a crucial moment for the rise of Turkish nationalism (YOLCU, 2015). According to this historiography, the defeat imposed a new reality on the leaders of the Ottoman Empire, who were forced to abandon the Ottoman project and to adopt a new national project centered on the ethnic cleavage. This perspective, however, is not a consensus in historiography. Many historians are more reticent about the triumph of Turkish nationalism in the post-war period. For many, other projects were equally, if not more, important (GINIO, 2005).

In light of this, the article seeks to analyze some of the representations about the trauma of the defeat and the future of the Ottoman Empire through the editorials of an Ottoman newspaper, *La Jeune Turquie*, which was published in Paris during the conflict. The intention is not to present a detailed and comprehensive picture of the various narratives about the conflict but to assess some of the impasses about the event. More specifically, we seek to present the Balkan War as a liminal period. It was a traumatic experience that constituted a rearrangement of existing tendencies, unveiling new expectations for the future. The argument presented here is that more than a "point of no return," the defeat brought a new horizon of expectations on the Ottoman leaders.

The defeat led to the advent of an uncertain scenario concerning the identity of the political community. In the Ottoman Empire, the cultural identities were fluid, multiethnic, and multireligious. With the emergence of nationalist movements in the Empire, including Turkish nationalism, this condition was disputed. In the decades following the end of the Great World War, the implantation of Turkish nationalism aimed to overcome the identity's fluidity of the Empire and promote the idea of a nation-state. The Turkish State, under the leadership of Kemal Attaturk, sought to affirm its modern and secular character through reforms that brought the country closer to the West, or to the idea of the West as was imagined by Republican leaders. In this process, the religious dimension was separated from the public space. In the early years of the republic, the narrative about Turkish identity incorporated three crucial aspects into its core: secularization, nationalism, and westernization. Turkish leaders sough to distance themselves from the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, and, with this, they refuted symbols and identities linked to the Ottoman period.

This article seeks to look at the Imperial period from a perspective that recognizes the ideological complexity of that period. The main objective is to evaluate how different identities and projects, more than being excluded, overlap each other in a scenario characterized by a plurality of voices.

Trends in the historiography on the relationship between nationalism (s) in the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan War (1912-1913)

When looking at the past to make sense of events, different narratives are possible, and, as a result, events can be organized in different ways, given different meanings. As Nader Sohrabi argues, it is possible to note two classic narratives about the Balkan War, reproduced, to some extent, by the nationalist discourses of the countries involved in the conflict. On the one hand, there are those narratives that blame the CUP's "Turkish chauvinism" as a factor that precipitated nationalist reactions from ethnic and religious minorities. On the other hand, there is the understanding that Turkish nationalism was a reaction to minority uprisings and not its cause (SOHRABI, 2018, p.2). This perspective suggests that the Empire's successive wars imposed a new cultural and demographic reality favorable to the emergence of Turkish nationalism (SOHRABI, 2018, p.4).

According to Ramazan Öztan (2018), the historiography of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century acted more as a national historiography of Turkey (ÖZTAN, 2018, p .65-66). Öztan argues that it is possible to identify an inclination of Turkish historiography of the early years of the Republic to see the Ottoman Empire's History from a teleological perspective. For this historiography, the traumatic experience of defeat brought an end to the Ottomanist project, precipitating a hegemonic project linked to Turkish ethnic nationalism (ÖZTAN, 2018, p.66). The traditional narrative portrays this event as a mythical foundational moment: a "point of no return" in Turkish nationalism's ascendancy. It was an episode that foreshadowed the Empire's imminent collapse (ÖZTAN, 2018, p.66).

The theme of the significance of defeat as a foundational moment is recovered more nuanced in more contemporary studies. Umut Uzer (2016), for example, argues that the politicized awareness of Turkish identity was a reaction to the spread of separatist nationalisms throughout the 19th century (UZER, 2016, p.7). The author considers that the rise of Turkish nationalism was caused by the belligerence of Serbian, Bulgarian, Albanian, and Arab national identities, and the Ottoman defeats in the Balkans. Uzer emphasizes the failure of 1913 as a pivotal moment for Turkish nationalism. According to Uzer:

> While some stirrings of Turkish nationalism existed earlier, it would not be incorrect to say that Turkish nationalism started to become an influential ideology only after the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. Only gradually did it penetrate the minds of the intellectuals and the masses (UZER, 2016, p. 7).

It is possible to see a teleological direction in this narrative about Turkish national identity. According to Uzer, the defeat imposed an unavoidable reality for the Ottoman leaders "as most of these territories were lost to new nationalist states, the establishment of a Turkish national state became the logical end result for Turks" (UZER, 2016, p16).

This interpretation, although widespread, is not consensual in historiography. Some works contest this view by establishing an opposite causal relationship: the centralizing and homogenizing "turquifying"

project promoted by the Ottoman leaders caused the reaction of many ethnic and religious communities (ZEINE, 1973). These are works that generally address the History of national movements from the perspective of different ethnic groups.

Recent historiography criticizes both of the above perspectives because these narratives give precedence to the ethnic component in the discourses and political projects at the beginning of the 20th century. For example, Eyal Ginio (2005) argues that the religious framework gained importance in opposition to other cultural aspects in the official speeches of the Empire after the conflict in 1913. For Ginio, the war was a historical inflection moment that marked a change in the CUP attitude. During and after the defeat in 1913, the transition from a secular Ottomanism to an Islamic-Ottomanism is noticeable (GINIO, 2005, p.159). According to Ginio:

> The Balkan wars proved the frailty of the secular Ottoman identity. The failure of an Ottoman collective identity spelled the end of the imagined secular 'Ottoman nation'. Nevertheless the wars emphasized the vitality of Islam and its fundamental linkage and potential for the Ottoman dynasty (GINIO, 2005, p. 177).

This reading points to a different direction from those adopted by more traditional approaches. However, Ginio's argument shares with the above perspectives the principle that it is possible to point out the Ottoman Empire's hegemonic ideology after the war. Other authors, however, prefer to point out the uncertain, flexible, and even "experimental" character of political and cultural identities in the early 20th century in the Ottoman Empire.

Eissenstat (2015), for example, argues that, since the 19th century, the political and intellectual elites of the Empire sought to deal with the problems arising from international competition and the increase of internal divisions based on a modernization project that promoted, among others aspects, the construction of a shared "national Ottoman" feeling (EISSENSTAT, 2015). For Eissenstat, this project was a reaction of the elites to an adverse scenario and had practical and instrumental foundations. The author explains the Empire's vacillating and contradictory approach concerning defensive ideologies and the proposed political community project.

Despite pointing out certain convergences between the centralization process and "turquificant" measures promoted by the leaders, Eissenstat recognizes that the loss of Balkan territory and the influx of Muslim refugees favored the tendency to characterize the "Ottoman nation" in religious terms, without, however, abandon the project of "civil nationalism" (EISSENSTAT, 2015, p.458). Eissenstat endorses Ginio's argument by arguing that religious discourse was strategic in propaganda promoted by the Empire. However, Eissenstat emphasizes the Ottoman Empire's adaptive character. According to the author, since the 19th century, the Ottoman leadership has adopted speeches and projects pragmatically to respond to new challenges.

Nader Sohrabi also employs an instrumental and pragmatic approach to identities to understand states' directions during and after the Balkan War. For Sohrabi, the salience of national identities needs to be

understood both as a cause and as an outcome of the conflict. According to the author, security challenges, driven by centrifugal forces, led to a centralizing and homogenizing project in the early 20th century. However, this project was not openly "turquifying" (SOHRABI, 2018, p. 4-5).

Sohrabi moves away from an essentialist view of identities and argues that the fluidity and malleability of identities in the early 20th century allowed political actors to exploit identities in order to guarantee political gains in a scenario of growing competition (SOHRABI, 2016, p. 32).In this scenario, elites and intellectuals were crucial in the process of politicizing ethnic identities. But Sohrabi argues that the war experience was the main factor that explains the national identities consolidation. According to Sohrabi:

> (...) in an atmosphere of increasing violence, threat of war, and the possibility of diminishing territorial claims, nothing fixed identities more firmly than the need for protection and allies that could secure resources needed for survival or preserving a way of life (SOHRABI, 2016, p. 33).

In opposition to Eissensat and Ginio, Sohrabi understands that CUP leaders adopted a softer version of religious discourse in the conception of "neo-Ottoman nationalism" (SOHRABI, 2018, p. 6). According to Sohrabi, there was a rearrangement of the hierarchy between the central elements of Ottoman identity, forming concentric circles whose inner circle was formed by a Turkish core. On the other hand, Islam represented a larger circle that contained the Turkish core and other Muslim ethnic groups. Finally, the Ottoman identity encompassed all communities, Muslims and non-Muslim (SOHRABI, 2018, p. 12).

Present in the argument of Sohrabi and Eissenstat, and shared to some extent by the other authors presented here, is the understanding that the centralization process promoted by the Ottoman leaders was one of the central factors in the escalation of the conflict between the Empire and the movements in search of regional autonomy. The point of disagreement is whether these measures represented a "Turkifying" project or not.

Erol Ülker (2005) draws attention to the literature's lack of agreement about what the Empire's "Turkification" process is. According to the author, the term" is used more generally as a synonym for centralization policies. However, Ülker finds evidence that after the defeat, the empire deliberately adopted "Turkification" measures in some regions. In this perspective, the Balkan War acted as a "catalyst", transforming "the already existing Turkish consciousness of Young Turks into nationalization policies" (ÜLKER, 2005, p. 622).

Besides that, Ülker argues that many approaches misread the Ottoman policies because they generalize measures implemented in a given province as evidence of a general political project. The author argues that "Young Turks employed different measures in the different regions of the empire and for the different communities" (ÜLKER, 2005, p. 622). In the Arab provinces, the tendency towards "Turkification" was less pronounced. In these regions, the Empire chose to defend a discourse of religious unity. In Anatolia, however, the "Turkification" project was much more pronounced, reflecting the notion that Anatolia was the "Turkish

homeland". In this central region, the CUP adopted explicit measures to favor the Turks and promoted forced migrations to homogenize the region (ÜLKER, 2005, p. 625).

This review intended to illustrate the diversity of interpretations about the effects of war on the rise of national movements and ideologies in the Ottoman Empire. In this sense, it is essential to assess how each discourses articulated different conceptions of political community. The argument presented here is that the study of the narratives elaborated in that period allows us to capture some of the expectations about the future, which is was intrinsically connected to how each narrative conceived the idea of political community.

Historical events as a moment of re-articulation between past and future

The study of "critical junctures" has a long tradition in the political sciences and in international relations. Traditional approaches conceive "critical junctures" as decisive moments that occur in a relatively short period of time, involving an event or a set of events, which result in profound changes, altering historical trajectories in "irreversible directions" (CAPOCCIA, 2016; HALL, 2016; MAHONEY *et al*., 2016).

While this perspective contributes to understanding the processes of State-building, it presents some analytical dangers. One is to take critical moments as irreversible points in a teleological evolution. In other words, there is a risk of portraying these moments as events that point to an inevitable end, thereby losing the window of opportunities present in each event. It is important to remember that the chain of events considered critical is part of the rationalization effort made a posteriori by the researchers. The researchers select, among the various events that occurred in the past, those that they consider to be the most relevant and establish a connection between them. Thus, depending on the narrative proposed by the researcher, it is possible to select different events, give different meanings to them, and establish distinct connections between them.

This article aims to evaluate the Balkan War as a liminal period, characterized by a sequence of significant events that reordered social representations and generated new expectations for the future. The argument put forward is that the war experience opened a complex period, which brought out existing contradictions and engendered new tendencies, reflecting an uncertain future (ÖZTAN, 2018).

This article uses the concept of "historical event", proposed by William Sewell, to investigate the conflict's impacts on Ottoman History. According to Sewell, an event is "(1) a ramified sequence of occurrences that (2) is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that (3) results in a durable transformation of structure". In this perspective, what distinguishes events from everyday occurrences is the significance attributed by those who experience them, directly or indirectly (BEREZIN, 2012). Significant events are generally given political and cultural significance by those who experience them. Events considered to be important are

different from the ordinary events of daily life because they are inflection points in History. Significant events become a reference in the collective perception of the passage of time (MAST, 2006, p. 117).

Sewell suggests that the expectation generated by historical events usually produces more significant events, thus creating a sequence of significant events. Still, he does not detail the links between the experienced past and the expectations engendered by historical events (BEREZIN, 2012). In this sense, this paper argues that it is essential to capture the temporal complexity of historical events to avoid teleological narratives. This article is in line with Arlette's argument that the analysis of historical events requires assessing how such events articulate past and future (FARGE, 2002).

On the one hand, the experience of events does not occur in isolation from the set of individual and collective experiences that already exist. Events happen in a context marked by "perceptions and sensitivities" established before their occurrence (FARGE, 2002). They are coded, classified, and ordered within a pre-existing broader socially representative scheme (BEREZIN, 2012, p. 620).

On the other hand, the effects of a significant event transcend the immediate temporality and change the historical context. In addition to the direct impacts on social and political relations, significant events become essential components of social representations (FARGE, 2002). As Arlette Farge observes, changing conjunctural and structural patterns involves changing expectations for the future, generating a set of new meanings and representations that guide individuals' actions and practices (FARGE, 2002). In other words, events matter, as they allow those who experience them to contemplate new relationships and connections among dimensions of social and political life. These are moments of inflection in which new possibilities and new visions of possible paths are engendered (BEREZIN, 2012, p. 620).

In this perspective, the historical event is not synonymous with isolated events or the "great deeds of great men", typical of positivist history. As the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1992) argues, contemporary historiography has rehabilitated the event as an important dimension of History. According to Ricoeur, despite the uniqueness of each historical event, it is possible to observe in its occurrence the inflection between past and future. For individual and collective consciousness, it is in the "eventuality of the present" (*l'événementialité du présent*) that the past incorporated into the experience and the expectation of the future intersect (RICOEUR, 1992). For Ricoeur:

> The event takes place in the very constitution of historical time where the memory of what was, the expectation of what will be, and the present emergence of what we do and experience as agents and patients of History are joined (RICOEUR, 1992, p. 34)[1].

This excerpt conceives an event as the intersection of the experienced past and the expected future. This conception avoids the dangers of a teleological notion of events because it considers the possibilities at a given historical moment. The passage also draws attention to the fact that individuals are able to affect History, but, on the other hand, they are also affected by History.

1. L'événement prend place dans la constitution même du temps historique où se conjoignent la mémoire de ce qui fut, l'expectation de ce quis era et le surgissement présent de ce que nous faisons et subissons comme agentes et patients de l'histoire.

Decisively, the Balkan War was a historical event. It was a period of transformation. However, more than an irreversible moment for the countries involved, the war was a period when new expectations were created from an unprecedented and significant experience (YAVUZ, 2013). It is a liminal period[2] of reorientation of existing tendencies and the creation of new meanings that overlap with those that already existed.

In this sense, the analysis of newspapers of the time is a useful approach that allows the researcher to contemplate facets of the debate about the Empire's past and future. The study of the editorials of *La Jeune Turquie* reveals how the war experience was elaborated by a group that presented itself as a representative of Ottoman interests on French soil.

2. According to the anthropologist Victor Turner, a liminal period is a complex and dramatic period of time in which long-lasting processes and trends are succeeded by "social dramas", which "made explicit many of the contradictions hidden in these processes and generate new myths, symbols, and paradigms" (TURNER, 1974, p. 99).

"La Jeune Turquie: Organe des Intérêts Géneraux de l'Empire Ottoman"

La Jeune Turquie (*The Young Turkey*) was a french newspaper published in Paris in which frontispice it defined itself as an "organ for the defense of the general interests of the Ottoman Empire", first published in 1910. The newspaper's issues preserved and available for consultation in The National Library of France cover the period between 1910 and 1914, suggesting that its circulation ceased at the eve of the Great War.

The defense of Ottoman Empire's interests, however, was not linked to any image of the Empire in abstract. As the title suggests, the newspaper's political affiliation was explicitly favorable to the CUP regime, implying the reproduction of images of Ottoman history that marked a deep cut with the previous Hamidian regime (1876-1909), portrayed as a period of tyranny. In this sense, in April 2, 1910 editorial:

> At the day after the magnificent effort by which Turkey freed itself from Hamidian tyranny, there was an influx of sympathies towards our country. It seemed to Europe that it found again a part of itself, or rather than this part, this member of the great European family, long paralysed, would be reborn to life. The lively and generous blood of freedom would circulate again and make Turkey a true nation among other nations![3]

With this re elaboration of the past, *La Jeune Turquie* could create a legitimacy for the CUP regime as a restoration of historical trends of the Ottoman Empire, marking an opposition to the reign of Sultan Abdül Hamid II, that would be the real exceptional moment in Ottoman history, due to its despotism incompatible with the values of the European family of nations.

3. Au landemain du magnifique effort par lequel la Turquie s'affranchit de la tyrannie hamidienne, ce fut vers notre pays un afflux de sympathies. Il samblait à l'Eurupe qu'elle retrouvait une partie d'elle-même, ou plutôt que cette partie, ce membre de la grande famille européenne, longtemps paralysé, renaisait à la vie. Le sang vivace et généreux de la liberté allait y circuler à nouveau et faire de la Turquie une nation véritable parmi les autres nations !

In this sense, it is important to recover the late 19th century meaning of the European family of nations. This notion lays on the principle which suppose an hierarchy among nations based, in one hand, on the conscience of a moral sentiment of European societies and a normative-psychological dictum about right and wrong in civilized contemporaries and, in other hand, the consciousness of that moral sentiment and civilizational standard as objectively true for everybody. Martti Koskenniemi (2004) argues that this conscience/consciousness laid at the origins of International Law in the 19th century and, as a

consequence, as long as International Law was a product of European civilizational process, the "civilized" category could not be completely applied outside of that region.

Koskenniemi's approach usefully shed light to the ambiguous status of the late Ottoman Empire towards Europe. Although it is considered that the Ottomans was formally admitted as a part of the European family of nations with the signature of the Treaty of Paris, in 1856, when the Ottoman Sultan was recognized as equal to European monarchs, the Ottoman Empire was never in fact accepted as an equal member, remaining as an "other" by which Europeans differentiated themselves as a collective identity (GÖL, 2003, p. 1).

It is reasonable to suppose that *La Jeune Turquie*' evocation of the image of Ottoman Empire as a part of, a member of "the great European family" was a statement towards French public opinion of the civilized conscious/consciousness shared by Ottomans as much as Europeans. But it is also reasonable to suppose the perception of the difference between Ottomans and Europeans due to the own necessity of an organ for the defense of the general interests of the Ottoman Empire. It is found in the same editorial cited above:

> To satisfy one, to fight the others, our national press, publishing in the Empire, could not serve because insufficiently read, or rather not read at all beyond the frontiers of our country.
> [...]
> The need for an organ for the defense of the general interests of the Ottoman Empire was essential.
> The road was therefore clear, we could embark on it without fear, there was a beautiful patriotic work to be completed. And this is how we were led to found La Jeune Turquie.
> La Jeune Turquie will be the organ for the defense of the general interests of the Ottoman Empire. Flag bearer, in France, of our beautiful country, it will make the flag of the Fatherland float high.
> [...]
> To the foreign press, which often, if not always, judges the Eastern question in its own way and according to its various ambitions, La Jeune Turquie will reclaim that there is in this Eastern Question an Ottoman point of view which must take precedence over the others.[4]

Considering the exposure, how could *La Jeune Turquie* be interpreted as a research object? It must be said that the newspaper does not fit sufficiently well in the tradition of the Ottoman francophone press. The notion of an Ottoman francophone press comprehends a set of titles and publications edited and published in French language in Ottoman territory. It refers to an editorial tradition in the Empire with the first Ottoman regular journal in French language established by French journalist Alexandre Blacque at Smyrna (Izmir) - *Le Courrier de Smyrne*, between 1828 to 1831. *Le Courrier* was followed in time by other titles in French which aimed to defend interests of the French colonies in Ottoman territories (BARUH, 2017, p.299). However, even the Ottoman government contributed to the establishment of an Ottoman francophone press, with the publication of the official journal, *Takvim-i Vekayi*, in French with title of *Moniteur ottoman*, between 1831 and 1843 (BARUH, 2017, p.300). Important to say that, as time went by, the francophone press in Ottoman Empire became not only

4. Pour satisfaire l'une, pour combattre les autres, notre presse nationale, se publiant dans l'Empire, ne pouvait sufire parce qu'insuffisamment lue, ou plutôt pas lus du tout au-delà des frontière de notre pays.
[...]
La nécessité d'un organe de défense des intérêts généraux de l'Empire Ottoman s'imposait.
La route était donc libre, nous pouvions nous y engager sans crainte, il y avait là une belle oeuvre patriotique àa ccomplir.
Et c'est ainsi que nous fûmes conduits à fonder La Jeune Turquie.
La Jeune Turquie sera l'organe de défense des intérêts géneraux de l'Empire Ottoman. Porte-Drapeau, en France, de notre beau pays, elle fera flotter haut l'oriflamme de la Patrie.
[...]
A la presse étrangère qui, souvent, pour ne pas dire toujours, juge la question d'Orient à sa façon et selon ses ambitions diverses, La Jeune Turquie rapellera qu'il y a dans cette Question d'Orient un point de vue ottoman qui doit primer tour les autres.

the press read by French colonies in Ottoman territories, but also the press read by Ottoman francophone elites, until the outbreak of the Great War (ATEŞ, 2015).

In the case of *La Jeune Turquie*, although it's records were catalogued by The National Library of France as *Ottoman francophone press*, it must be considered that the journal was not published in Ottoman territories, but in Paris, aiming to dialogue with the Parisian ottoman colony and with the French public opinion. This aspect is meaningful considering the importance of Paris as the capital city of the expansionist French Third Republic (1870-1940) and, as a consequence, the capital city of a rival empire of the Ottomans in the age of the imperialist competition and the capital city of one of the Great Powers prior to the Great War.

As *porte-drapeau* of Ottoman interests towards French public opinion, *La Jeune Turquie* was clearly an unofficial journal. Beyond that, the newspaper also was directed to the Ottoman community in Paris. According to Klaus Kreiser (2000, *333-336*), Parisian *belle époque* exerted a fascination over the modernized Ottoman elite that could be noticed in writings of many Ottoman intellectuals of that time. There are many reasons to justify the phenomena, which could be summarized in three main factors. Firstly, the role played by French language in some *ethos* of Ottoman elite. In addition to the fact that French was the language of access to the highest positions in Ottoman bureaucracy, the main newspapers read by Constantinople elite were published in French.

Secondly, it was above all to Paris where it used to go Ottoman intellectuals and students in their formative years, often with Ottoman government patronage, aiming to form human resources needed for the Empire to promote its modernisation process. Such politics began with the *Tanzimat*, in 1836, and lasted until the Great War. Finally, it was in Paris where the Young Turks movement was formed in opposition to the Hamidian regime. In Paris, according to Erdal Kaynar (2012, p.31) the westernised Ottoman elite, among them the Young Turks, could establish "a bond in world scale" with European elites. The fascination with bourgeois way of life of the *belle époque* cultivated by Ottoman elite made Paris the Mecca of the modern world for westernised Ottomans (ibidem, p.32).

The establishment of a journal for the defense of Ottoman interests in Paris had particular cultural sense, located at the highly westernized Young Turk's images of modernity, as much as an strategic effort to intervene in European public opinion - even if limited to metropolitan France - in order to promote, in the terms of the cited above, the Ottoman point of view of the Eastern Question. *La Jeune Turquie's* discourse could be, therefore, understood as a discourse negotiated *in-between*, which means, according to Homi Bhabha (1994, p.29, emphasis added),

> The contribution of negotiation is to display the 'in-between' of this crucial argument; it is *not* self contradictory, but *significantly performs* [...] *the problems of judgement and identification that inform the political space of its enunciation.*

La Jeune Turquie and the Balkan Wars (1912-1913)

In this section, it will be discussed how the liminal event of the Balkan Wars was represented in the pages of *La Jeune Turquie*, highlighting discursive cleavages produced by the radical transformation of the journal's political space of enunciation due to Ottoman defeat for the Balkan League.

The Balkan Wars implied the almost complete withdrawal of the Ottomans from Europe. In the following weeks to the war declaration by Montenegro in October 8, 1912, and the formation of the Balkan League, in which joined Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, in October 17, the Ottoman borders in Europe withdraw until the lines of Çatalca, thereabout only 60 kilometers from Constantinople. In Paris, the Ottoman confidence on the war, expressed in *La Jeune Turquie* issue of October 9, 1912, gave place to images of terrifying events and the Ottoman defeat in the following issues. In an editorial published in November 14, 1912, only a month since the beginning of the war, it is written:

> So, to transform the two hundred thousand men of the ordu of Thrace into a nameless mob, to completely sweep away two provinces where only Adrianople and Scutari today defend the honor of the Ottoman arms, to make tremble the successor of Mahomet II [sic] in Constantinople, it only took a month!
> Today the Ottoman soldiers, without bread, without cartridges, without leaders, shivering, fleeing with haggard eyes the plains where the Balkan guns spit an invisible death whisper superstifiously that the times have come and that, if they want to rest in the ground of Islam, it will be prudent of them to seek their last asylum under the funeral cemeteries of Asia. Today, an immense and pitiful exodus sends back to Constantinople a terrified crowd and transforms the capital into a vast encampment of nomads.[5]

It is not the objective of this present work to evaluate the horrors of the war. However, it is noticeable that terrifying descriptions of the war such as cited above, occupy the journal pages in the first weeks of the conflict. According to Y. Doğan Çetinkaya (2014), images of atrocities in the battlefield compose an *atrocity propaganda* strategy, through which it was aimed to mobilize and the nationalisation of the masses as a bet for reversing the low morale of the Ottomans after de defeat.

Based on Çetinkaya's (2014) approach, which Ottoman nation was mobilised during Balkan Wars in the pages of La Jeune Turquie? It is meaningful to observe that, with the outbreak of the war, the journal did not apply the term *nation* to designate the Ottomans or the Empire. The word often used was *homeland* (*patrie*) and that was because the journal sustained the principle of *Ottomanism* in order to justify the Empire's territorial integrity.

The Ottomanist discourse was already presented in the October 9, 1912 editorial, at the eve of the war, when *La Jeune Turquie* affirmed that "the [European] cabinets well know that [...] there are as much Christians as Muslims among the citizens who would defend the Ottoman homeland".[6] More enthusiastically, in the editorial of October 30, 1912,

> Should we believe, along with many war correspondents, that the Christians have brought an element of weakness and disorganization into our

5. Ainsi donc, pour transformer en une cohue sans nom les deux cent mille hommes de l'ordou de Thrace, pour balayer entièrement deux provinces où seules Andrinople et Scutari défendent aujoud'hui l'honneur des armes ottomanes, poru faire trembler dans Constantinople le successeur de Mahomet II, il a suffu d'un mois! Aujoud'hui les soldats ottomans, sans pain, sans cartouches, sans chefs, grelottants, fuyant avec des yeux hagards les plaines où les canons balkaniques crachent une mort invisible murmurent superstifieusement que les temps sont venus et que, s'ils veulent reposer en terre d'Islam, in sera prudent de leur part de chercher leur dernier asile sous les cippes fun´raires des cimerières d'Asie. Aujoud'hui, une immense et pitoyable exode fair refluer vers Constantinople une foule terrifiée et transforme la capitale n un vaste campement de nomades.

6. Les cabinets savent bien [...] qu'il y a d'ailleurs autant de chrétiens que de musulmans parmi les citoyens qui défendraient maintenant la patrie ottomane.

> valiant army? Until proven otherwise, we refuse to do so. The admirable enthusiasm with which all nationalities and all religions have contributed to the organization of relief for the wounded proves that the fine theory of Ottomanism has borne fruit and that for everyone, Armenians, Greeks, Arabs or Turks, it now there is only one preoccupation: The homeland is in danger![7]

However, as long as the defeat became an irreversible reality for the Ottomans, a profound inflexion marked *La Jeune Turquie*'s discourse. The prior enthusiastic Ottomanism gave place to a wide and ambiguous horizon of expectations, marked by a rage of future possibilities for the Empire and the Ottoman homeland. Such inflection firstly appeared in the journal's pages in the editorial of January 22, 1913. The Ottomanism started to gain a new shape, hanging between a Turkism and a wilder moderniser allegiance to the Empire:

> *Ogni male non vien per nuocere*, say the Italians: may this proverb come true in the Turkey of tomorrow! Perhaps first of all the current amputation - despite all our regrets - will help to facilitate the achievement of national unity and at the same time that of the reforms which are necessary if we want to make the Empire a strong and prosperous state. Already, to virilize our souls irritated by the harmful influence of Byzantium, a former minister proposes to remove Constantinople from the title of capital and to transport the heart of Turkey to the interior, to the center of the country, under a harsher climate, in the healthiest environment of laborers in which great peoples and invincible armies are made. Turks, not Levantines, citizens and not merchants, soldiers and not officials, this is what we need.
> It will be necessary that the statesmen of tomorrow, taking up the beautiful theories of *Ottomanism*, work to unite Amenians, Arabs and Turks in the bosom of the mutilated homeland. They will succeed through the civic education of the people, which will immediately follow liberal reforms. And immediately afterwards, they will have to take care of the development of the pause, the only one capable of making us rich and strong.[8]

The April 22 editorial assessed the effects of the war, demanding the leaders an effort to lead the Empire towards a normality state. At that time, the Ottomans needed to strive to "Healing the wounds, reorganizing and enhancing what remains of the Empire (…)" (LA JEUNE TURQUIE, April 22, 1913)[9]. According to the editorial, the priority should be to preserve what had left of the Empire, leveraging all its possibilities. There was an attempt to present a favorable depiction of the conjuncture, despite the defeat. The defeat made it more homogeneous and, therefore, easier to manage. The image shown by the newspaper was of the "amputation of a sick member" which would allow the Empire to restore its vitality:

> There, all the populations are of the same religion and it will be easy to reconcile them, by making them understand their common interest. Perhaps even - however cruel this admission may be - the loss of a third of our Empire will be a relief for us. Our European provinces were, in effect, a heavy burden which, without guaranteeing us any profit, cost a lot of effort and attention, while alienating us much of Western opinion (LA JEUNE TURQUIE, April 22, 1913)[10].

After the signing of the London treaty on June 10, the war was over for the Ottoman Empire. However, the conflict continued among the Balkan countries, and the Ottoman leaders were still facing an uncertain

7. Faut-il croire, avec de nombreux correspondants de guerre, que les chrétiens ont apporté dans notre vaillante armée un élément de faiblesse et de désorganisation? Jusqu'à la preuve contraire nous nois y refusons. L'admirable élan avec lequel toutes les nationalités, toutes les religions ont contribué à l'organisation des secours aux blessés prouve que la belle théorie de l'ottomanisme a porté ses fruits et que pour tous, Arméniens, Grecs, Arabes ou Turcs, il n'y a maintenant qu'une préoccupation: La patrie est en danger!

8. Ogni male non vien per nuocere, disent les Italiens: Puisse ce proverbe se réaliser dans la Turquie de demain! Peut-être d'abord l'amputation actuelle - malgré tous nos regrets - contribuera-t-elle à faciliter la réalisation de l'unité nationale et en même temps celle des réformes qui s'imposent si nous voulons faire de l'Empire un État fort et prospère. Déjà, pour viriliser nos âmes énervées par l'influence néfaste de Byzance, un ancien ministre propose d'enlever à Constantinople son titre de capitale et de transporter le coeur de la Turquie à l'intérieur, au centre du pays, sous un climat plus rude, dans le milieu le plus sain des laboureurs que seuls font les peuples grands et les armées invincibles. Des Turcs, et non des Levantins, de citoyens et non des mercantis, des soldats et non des fonctionnaires, voilà ce qu'il nous fault. Il faudra que les hommes d'Etat de demain, reprenant les belles théories de l'ottomanisme travaillent à unir Arméniens, Arabes et Turc dans le giron de la patrie mutilée. Ils y réussiront par l'éducation civique du peuple, que suivront aussitôt des réformes libérales. Et immédiatement après, ils devront s'occuper de la mise en valeur du pays, seule capable de nous rendre riche et forts.

9. Panser les plaies, réorganiser et mettre en valeur ce qui nous reste de l'Empire, cette tâche a de quoi permettre à nos hommes d'Etat de monter leurs facultés et se consoler en prouvant que, même après cette guerre désastreuse et cette amputtation, la Turquie peut encore faire figure dans le monde.

10. Là, toutes les populations sont de même religion et il sera facile de les concilier, en leur faisant comprendre leur intérêt commun. Peut-être même – quelque cruel nous soit cet aveu – la perte du tiers de notre Empire sera-t-elle pour nous un soulagement. Nos provinces d'Europe étaient, en effect, une lourde charge qui, sans nous garantir aucun profit, coûtait beaucoup d'efforts et d'attentions, tout en nous aliénant une bonne partie de l'opinion occidentale.

scenario. There was a fear that the conflict could bring the Great Powers into the region. In this scenario, the editorial expresses an apprehension about a possible division of the Empire into spheres of influence by the European powers. According to the editorial of July 9:

> They are already talking about areas of influence, the Muscovite is already eyeing Armenia, England is taking up Mehmed-Ali's dream and Germany is thinking of carving out the lion's share between Alexandretta and the Persian Gulf. As for France, threatened by seeing its rivals share this magnificent Empire which was undoubtedly sovereign twenty years ago, it can only remember that Lebanon still considers it as its first protector (LA JEUNE TURQUIE, July 9, 1913)[11].

11. Déjà l'on parle de zones d'influence, déjà le Moscovite couve des yeux l'Armenie, l'Angleterre reprend le rêve de Mehmed-Ali et l'Allemagne songe à se tailler la part du lion entre Alexandrette et le Golfe Persique. Quant à la France, ménacée de voir ses rivaux ou émules se partager ce magnifique Empire où son influence était incontestablement souveraine il y a mins de vingt ans, elle ne peut que se rappeler que le Liban la considère toujours comme sa protectrice au premier chef. Et c'est ainsi que les soldats jouent aux dés le marteau du Prophète avant même que le martyr n'ait rendu le dernier soupir.

On the other hand, the uncertain scenario also led to more optimistic expectations[12]. The editorial pointed to the possibility of the Empire taking back the lost territory in the face of the enemies' potential weakening. Since the crisis had not yet resolved, chance and the imponderable could intervene in the course of events. The conflict among the adversaries was portrayed as an unexpected opportunity. According to the editorial, the ottomans should:

> (..) never be despaired because the yesterday's ruthless winner can be betrayed by fortune, and tomorrow lose, by force, what he conquered by force (...). Now, by a sort of miracle, circumstances offered Turkey an unexpected opportunity for revenge (LA JEUNE TURQUIE, July 9, 1913)[13].

12. It is not possible to infer whether the authors sincerely believed in this possibility or whether it was just propaganda. Still, it is important to understand how the newspaper sought to frame the situation to the European public and how it signified the present and the future.

13. ne faut jamais désespérer et que l'impitoyable vainqueur d'hier peut être trahi par la fortune à son tour et perdre demain par la force ce qu'il a conquis par la force. (...) A cette nouvelle, tous les coeurs ottomans ont frémi. Voilà que, par une sorte de miracle, les circonstances offraient à la Turquie une occasion inespérée de revanche.

It is important to observe that the optimism was not limited to the possibility of retaking the lost territories, but it was related to the expectations that the Empire would resume its protagonism in the Mediterranean. The edition of September 10 expresses the acknowledgment of the impossibility of recovering the lost territory. But according to the editorial, the Empire could flourish again, even if the territories were not recovered:

> The Ottoman Empire, diminished but concentrated, amputated but more homogeneous, returned from its illusions about the guarantees of integrity, supported by an educated army and stationed modern battleships, will not only be able to defend its heritage, but will also play the role of a real power in the depths of the Mediterranean (LA JEUNE TURQUIE, September 24, 1913).[14]

14. L'Empire Ottoman, diminué mais concentré, amputé mais plus homogène, revenu de ses illusions sur les garanties d'integrité, appuyé sur une armée instruite et garé par des cuirassés modernes, pourra non seulement défendre son patrimoine, mais encore jouer le rôle d'une véritable puissance au fond de la Méditerraanée.

In the editorials, the optimism about the Empire's future was conditional: optimism echoed the possibility of change and not the existence of a favorable international environment. The editorial presents a narrative that highlights both the need for development and modernization and the affirmation of patriotism. These two facets were intertwined in the conception of a strong national identity, as can be seen in the excerpt:

> Of course, I don't think we should be xenophobic, but let us be careful that the flag follows the goods, the guns the rail and that the battleships are ready to enter the ports abroad (LA JEUNE TURQUIE, September 10, 1913)[15].

On the other hand, the editorials' representation of the international situation outlines a very adverse picture. It is possible to observe the feeling of an imminent threat. The Empire could rise again if, and only if, it carried out the much-needed modernization. Otherwise, the situation was one of extreme vulnerability. The danger of separatism and the inter-

15. Certes, je ne pense pas que nous devions nous montrer xénophobes, mais prenons garde que le pavillon suit la marchandise, les canons le rail et que les cuirassés sont prêts á entrer dans les ports concédés à l'étranger.

vention of the Great Powers are present in the editorials. For example, the editorial of July 9 presents a situation marked by challenges and dangers:

> No doubt separatist tendencies could well manifest themselves in certain provinces, supported and corrupted by foreign gold. There is no doubt that there is no shortage of unscrupulous financiers and statesmen who believed they were accomplishing a fine feat in blaming Turkey's name on many nations (LA JEUNE TURQUIE, July 9, 1913)[16].

On the eve of the Great War, the editorial of January 14 presents a bleak and pessimistic scenario for the Empire. There is a sense of urgency regarding the implementation of modernization policies. The concern is not limited to the fear of the emergence of new separatist movements in the remaining provinces, stimulated by the great powers. The very core of the Empire, Asia Minor, was in danger of being occupied by foreign forces:

> We must understand, ourselves, that it is both our duty and our interest to regenerate our provinces of Asia Minor as quickly as possible, under penalty of seeing them follow the fate of most of our possessions from Europe[17] (LA JEUNE TURQUIE, January 14, 2014).

Almost tragically, it is possible to see a sentiment that the moment of rupture was close. The apprehension was a product not of a prophecy but of an assessment that the Ottoman Empire was a vulnerable State in an unstable international system. For the editorial of January, "the occupation and partition of Asia Minor could quickly follow the first incident that would ignite the powder" (LA JEUNE TURQUIE, January 14, 1914)[18]. It does not mean that the Ottomans were convinced that the Empire would come to an end soon. However, the expectations of the future were uncertain more than ever.

16. Cet odieux project se réalisera-t-il? Nous voulons encore espérer que non. Sans doute des tendances séparatistes pourraient bien se manifester dans certaines provinces, soutenues et corrompues par l'or étranger. Sans doute it ne manque pas de financiers et d'hommes d'Etat sans scrupules qui croirairent accomplir un bel exploit en raynt le nom de la Turquie de nombre des nations.

17. Nous devons comprendre, nous-mêmes, qu'il est à la fois de notre devoir et de notre intérêt de régénérer le plus rapidement possible nos provinces d'Asie Mineure, sous peine de les voir suivre le sort de la majeure partie de nos possessions d'Europe.

18. L'occupation et le partage de l'Asie-Mineure pourraient donc suivre à bref délai, le premier incident qui metrait le feu aux poudres.

Conclusion

Based on the assumption that people act according to how they interpret reality, making sense of historical events is a fundamental element of the analysis of critical junctures. It is important to note that the concatenation of events does not lead to a sequence of "points of no return". As much as the events presented in this paper are undoubtedly crucial for the construction of Turkish nationalism, this does not mean that the individuals who experienced these events perceived them according to the nationalist narrative constructed years later. Indeed, it is possible to find in the Ottoman defeat "objective" facts that help explain the collapse of the Empire (ÖZTAN, 2018, p.67). Bearing this in mind, it is crucial to the researchers to understand how the men and women of the past assessed the historical contexts in which they lived.

The Balkan War was a traumatic experience that represented, above all, a re-articulation of expectations about the future of the Ottoman Empire. It was a crucial moment not because it determined the only possible fate, but because it introduced a scenario marked by deep uncertainties. As Öztan argues:

> (...) more than anything else the Balkan Wars ushered in an era of political uncertainty and reshuffled debates over the future of the Ottoman Empire. The postwar era was characterized less by broad consensus than by debate and disagreement (ÖZTAN, 2018, p.68).

This article endorses the argument that the defeat in 1913 is an crucial moment in Ottoman Empire History not because it sealed the fate of the Empire, but because it created a new reality and introduced new expectations. It was a complex period filled with ambiguities. The analysis of a newspaper's editorials does not allow us to make generalizations. Still, this effort enables us to glimpse some facets, among many, of the debate that existed at the time.

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