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“HYBRID OSMANLEES”: RACIALISM, CAUCASIAN SLAVE TRADE AND THE RACE OF OTTOMAN TURKS

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CAUCASIAN SLAVE TRADE AND THE
RACE OF OTTOMAN TURKS

A Master’s Thesis

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Ankara
September 2022

In memory of my mother

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CAUCASIAN SLAVE TRADE AND THE RACE OF
OTTOMAN TURKS

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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September 2022

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By Ayşe Sıla Önder

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

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ABSTRACT

“HYBRID OSMANLEES”: RACIALISM, CAUCASIAN SLAVE TRADE AND THE RACE OF OTTOMAN TURKS

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September 2022

This thesis analyzes the Western perception of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks in the nineteenth century and how Caucasian slave trade complexified the perception in question. It relies on a vast array of primary sources to demonstrate how the racialist perspective towards Ottoman Turks and Caucasian slave trade became widespread in the nineteenth century. Following the emergence of race science as a respected field, the West sought to find a definite answer to the puzzling issue of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks. Raciologists agreed that Ottoman Turks came to possess a Caucasianized physical appearance as a result of white slavery while at the same time condemning the institution of white slavery in the Ottoman Empire as proof of the cultural and racial backwardness of Ottoman Turks. The racially mixed identity of Ottoman Turks also held interest in the West and discussions around it revealed the anxieties about racial intermingling and miscegenation which arose after the rise of the abolitionist movement.

Keywords: Race, Race Science, White Slavery, Abolition

ÖZET

“MELEZ OSMANLILAR”: İRK BİLİMİ, BEYAZ KÖLE TİCARETİ VE OSMANLI
TÜRKLERİNİN İRKİ

Önder, Ayşe Sıla

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Bu tez, Batı'nın 19. yüzyılda Osmanlı Türklerinin ırkı algısını ve Kafkas köle ticaretinin bu algıyı nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Osmanlı Türklerini ve Kafkas köle ticaretini incelerken ırkı temel alan bir anlamlandırma çeşidinin Batı'da nasıl yaygınlaştığını göstermek için pek çok farklı birincil kaynağa dayanır. İrk biliminin saygı duyulan bir alan olarak ortaya çıkmasıyla birlikte, Batı, Osmanlı Türklerinin kafa karıştıran ırk kimliği sorusuna kesin bir cevap aramaya çalışmıştır. İrk bilimciler genel olarak Kafkas köle ticareti sebebiyle Osmanlı Türklerinin beyaz ırkı andıran bir dış görünüşe sahip oldukları konusunda fikir birliğine varsalar da Kafkas köle ticaretinin kendisini Osmanlı Türklerinin kültürel ve irksal olarak geri kalmış olmasının bir kanıtı olarak ele aldılar. İrksal olarak melez bir kimlik taşıdıkları düşünen Osmanlı Türkleri, aynı zamanda Batı'da köle karşıtı hareketin yayılması sonucu ortaya çıkan ırkların karışması ve melezleşme konularına dair duyulan endişeli tartışmaların da odak noktası oldular.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İrk, İrk Bilimi, Beyaz Kölelik, Kölelik Karşıtlığı

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Writing at the turn of the twentieth century in 1903, the Ottoman intellectual Halil Halid who became an Oriental scholar in Britain, expressed his surprise at the racial classification of Ottoman Turks that he had read in *The Spectator*:

Not long ago I saw an article in the Spectator, dealing with the incapacity of dark races to adopt civilised manners, and, as one of the examples, it was cited that the late Midhat Pasha used to hate some aspects of European costume, especially evening dress. It was a revelation to me that Midhat and his nation were included in the category of the dark races.¹

As a once starry-eyed Ottoman political exile who became disillusioned with the West², Halid clearly disapproved of the inclusion of Ottoman Turks among the “dark races” by a British newspaper. However explicitly *The Spectator* classified Ottoman Turks among the “dark races” much to Halid’s dismay, the newspaper article to which the disillusioned Ottoman referred was far from being the line in the sand where the exact racial identity of Ottoman Turks was concerned. The Western perception of the race of Ottoman Turks was discordant at best since the invention of the concept of race. The question that puzzled nineteenth century racialist discussions in the West about the race of Ottoman Turks was whether “Midhat and his nation” could be classified as Caucasian or not. Numerous factors were at play in shaping the debate, from the agglutinative Turkish language to the historical evidence which pointed at an Asian origin possessed by Ottoman Turks. This racialist debate was not limited solely to scientific circles, it also found a place for itself in history books, pamphlets, congressional speeches and newspaper articles. This connection between science and culture was not unilateral, however. After all, it was the long-established trope of “Circassian beauty” that gave the name

¹ Halil Halid, *The Diary of a Turk* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1903; Project Gutenberg, 2015), 61, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/50048/50048-h/50048-h.htm#FNanchor_4_4

² Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 64.

“Caucasian” to the superior white race that has survived to this day. In that case, it was hardly surprising that the institution of white slavery and Caucasian slave trade in the Ottoman Empire found a central place for itself within the Western debates about the racial identity of Ottoman Turks. The question with which the West was preoccupied in relation to white slavery in the Ottoman Empire was to what extent this institution had an effect on the racial identity of Ottoman Turks, both physical and cultural. Caucasian slavery as it existed in the Ottoman Empire was typically regarded as having had a great influence upon the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks. Consequently, Ottoman Turks were considered to be a racially heterogeneous group of people. While discussing the racial heterogeneity of the Ottoman Turk as caused by Caucasian slavery, the West often referred to its own anxieties about racial intermingling and the dissolution of the racial hierarchy caused by the trends and developments in the long nineteenth century. In essence, the analysis of the West’s perception of the influence of Caucasian slavery on the racial identity of Ottoman Turks in the nineteenth century tells the story of the bilateral relationship between race science and culture, and the West’s own attitudes towards race, slavery, reform and abolition.

An analysis of the racialist discourse about the race of Ottoman Turks reveals the trajectory that race science and the concept of the superior Caucasian race followed as they developed in the nineteenth century. Race science turned to historical, linguistic and physical evidence to solve the enigma of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks. Among these groups of evidence, the “Caucasianized” physical appearance of Ottoman Turks made the strongest claim to their place within the Caucasian race. At the same time as race science came to be a respected field, abolitionist movement was gaining prominence in the Anglo-American sphere. Caucasian slave trade, which was initially credited as the reason why Ottoman Turks should belong in the Caucasian race by the earliest proponents of race science, began to attract criticism from British and American abolitionists which further complicated the matter of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks. Criticisms of white slavery in the Ottoman Empire were often

made through a racialist perspective. In short, white slavery in the Ottoman Empire and the racialist discourse of the nineteenth century about the racial identity of Ottoman Turks became intertwined. White slavery in the Ottoman Empire appeared in Anglo-American racialist texts as both the reason why Ottoman Turks had a “Caucasianized” appearance, a mixed racial identity, and degenerate, corrupt racial characteristics due to their continued practice of slavery and polygamy. Likewise, the Porte’s reforms in the nineteenth century which included efforts to suppress slave trade in the Ottoman Empire were regarded through a racialist lens. If Ottoman Turks could succeed in abolishing white slavery, they could be considered culturally suitable for the ranks of the Caucasian race.

Studying the Western perception of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks in the nineteenth century would be incomplete without Caucasian slavery. Whether historically or genetically accurate or not, the supposed influence of the Caucasian slaves on the racial identity of Ottoman Turks played a significant part as the West grappled with the question of where on the racial hierarchy “Midhat and his nation” belonged.

1.1. Brief Overview of the Invention of “Race” and Race Science

It is difficult to pinpoint an exact date for the birth of the term “race” in Western thought. The earliest proponents of a term that corresponds to today’s understanding of the term “race” were François Bernier, Comte de Buffon and Carl Linnaeus. It should be noted that what Bernier, Buffon and Linnaeus conceived of as “race” was inchoate at best and generally focused on physical differences as markers of different races.³ Nevertheless, the concept that the world population could be categorized into different “races” was slowly taking root. The birth of “race” was partly influenced by cultural stereotypes and tropes of the early modern period, the most significant one for this study being the trope of “Circassian beauty”.

Writing a century before Meiners who coined the term “Caucasian race”, François

³ Nicolas Bancel et al. *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2.

Bernier published his article “A New Division of the Earth” in *Journal des Sçavans* in 1684. His article was heavily influenced by the long-established trope of “Circassian beauty” and his personal travels in the East. He devoted a considerable portion of his article to discuss the superiority of Caucasian women in terms of physical beauty:

The Turks also have many very beautiful women, because apart from those who are natives of the country, who are not ugly, they have those Greek beauties of whom you have so often heard tell, and in addition a prodigious quantity of Slaves who reach them from Mingrelia, Georgia and Circassia, where, in the opinion of all the men from the Levant and of all Travellers, the loveliest women in the world are to be found. Moreover, at Constantinople, it is forbidden for Christians and Jews to buy a slave from Circassia: They are reserved only for Turks. When our friend M. le Chevalier Chardin talks about them - and he travelled in their Country - he is enchanted, and he asserts that, generally speaking, all of them are beautiful, and that in all his travels he has never seen anything so lovely.⁴

Bernier based his opinions on the physical beauty of Caucasian women on the travel accounts of French traveler Jean Chardin as well as his own impressions. Chardin was to be quoted again and again by the proponents of the supposed superiority of Caucasian women in beauty. He also stressed the sexual and reproductory nature of Caucasian slave trade in the Ottoman Empire. Bernier’s “a prodigious quantity of Slaves” were exclusively women whose servile status was “reserved only for Turks”. The Western assumptions about Caucasian slavery were as old as, if not older than, the concept of “race”.

The popularization of the concept of “race” gained momentum during the Enlightenment. More and more intellectuals began to theorize on different races of the world in their quest for knowledge. The Enlightenment’s interest in race laid the foundation for the following century’s race science and pseudoscientific racism. The Enlightenment provided the first theoretical tools towards a more scientific understanding of race which would reach its zenith in the nineteenth century and enjoy the privileges of being both popularized and institutionalized. The scientific turn that race took in the Enlightenment and the nineteenth

⁴ François Bernier. “A New Division of the Earth.” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 51 (2001): 247–50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289731> pp. 250.

century did not mean that it became free of the cultural tropes and stereotypes that influenced its birth in the first place. On the contrary, even when race science became an established and respected field in the nineteenth century, it still continued to feed on cultural assumptions about races it studied.

German historian and philosopher Christoph Meiners was the first to introduce the “Caucasian race” as a racial category in his *Grundriss der Geschichte der Menschheit (Outline of the History of Humanity, 1785)*.⁵ Meiners chose the term because he believed the inhabitants of the Caucasus region to be “the most beautiful people in the entire world”⁶, drawing on the already established stereotype of the “Circassian beauty”.⁷ The Caucasian race, being the most beautiful, was also the superior one, because physical appearance was not the only characteristic feature that Meiners suggested to be determined by one’s race. He also underlined the connaturality of certain cultural and political differences between different races. According to Meiners, the reason “why certain nations were always rulers and others servants, why the goddess of freedom lives in such tight boundaries and why the terrible despotism sits on an unshakable throne among the nations of the world”⁸ could be attributable to innate racial differences.

Pseudoscientific ventures into the racial classification of peoples were contemporaneous with the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment championed liberty, equality and the rights of man. Meiners’ views regarding the innate differences between races revealed the tension which arose out of the question of who deserved to have access to the ideals of the Enlightenment.⁹ The universality of the Enlightenment ideals was put at stake by the assumption that not everyone was born equal.

⁵ Bruce Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 84.

⁶ Baum, 86.

⁷ On the stereotype of Circassian beauty, see Irvin Cemil Schick, *Çerkes Güzeli: Bir Şarkiyatçı İmgenin Serüveni*, (İstanbul: Oğlak Yayıncılık, 2004).

⁸ Baum, 85.

⁹ Murat Ergin, “*Is The Turk a White Man?*”: *Race and Modernity in the Making of Turkish Identity* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2016), 4.; Baum, “Enlightenment Science and the Invention of the “Caucasian Race,” 1684–1795” in *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race*.

Despite coining the term “Caucasian” as a racial category, Meiners’ legacy was to be eclipsed by German physician and natural philosopher Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. Blumenbach adopted the term “Caucasian” but he refrained from making remarks about a deterministic cultural hierarchy.¹⁰ His method of classification was primarily physical. He was one of the forerunners of craniology. Through his study of human skulls, Blumenbach was convinced that the inhabitants of the Caucasus region, particularly Georgians, were “angelical” and that it was “impossible to paint more charming visages, or better figures, than those of the Georgians”.¹¹ The corollary was that the rest of the Caucasian race was, by extension, physically more “charming” than other races. Blumenbach’s abstention from establishing a cultural hierarchy did not prevent him from creating an “aesthetic” one.¹²

The contributions made by Blumenbach permeated into the nineteenth century, albeit with a more culturally deterministic twist.¹³ This period also witnessed efforts to subdivide the peoples grouped together as the Caucasian race into subgroups due to the rise of nationalist movements in Europe and growing tensions between different ethnicities, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. The deterministic and hierarchical perceptions about human races subsisted and found a place in popular discourse. The nineteenth century built on the previous century’s efforts to scientifically categorize different peoples and gave a pseudoscientific racist twist to the legacy it adopted. Race science and scientific racism turned into tools to legitimize colonialism and slavery, and restrict mass migration.¹⁴

One of the most influential writings on pseudoscientific racism of the nineteenth century was Arthur de Gobineau’s *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (1853-5). Gobineau was a firm believer in the innate superiority of the white race.¹⁵ He was widely read

¹⁰ Baum, 76.

¹¹ Ibid., 84.

¹² Ibid., 80.

¹³ Ibid., 97.

¹⁴ Baum, 119.

¹⁵ Takezawa, Y. I. , Smedley, . Audrey and Wade, . Peter. "race." Encyclopedia Britannica, November 23, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human>.

in Europe and the United States.¹⁶ Gobineau's work also echoed the nineteenth-century focus on the "races of Europe".¹⁷ This new trend introduced a hierarchy within the Caucasian race itself. The term "Aryan" came into use which denoted those who were the racially purest and superior among Caucasians.¹⁸ Race scientists relied on pseudoscientific branches like craniology and phrenology to distinguish between different races.

Eventually, the link between modernity and race was firmly established in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Race became "a criterion for weeding out those who would eternally be excluded from the Enlightenment project of establishing the universal rights of 'Man.'"²⁰ Those who belonged to races other than the superior Caucasian race were not included in the universality of the rights of Man. With nationalism on the rise in the second half of the nineteenth century, ethnic lines within races were also being drawn by the uppermost stratum of the Caucasian race which wanted to separate itself from the lower ranks occupied by Southern Europeans.²¹ Nevertheless, the lines that demarcated between races were thicker than the lines separating different ethnicities under the aegis of the Caucasian race.

Racialist thought was influenced by the advent of the abolitionist movement as well. The trajectory of the abolitionist movement dragged the Western perception of white slavery in the Ottoman Empire from the initially supposed marker of the "Caucasianness" of Ottoman Turks to the generally accepted view of it as the manifestation of the cultural and racial inferiority of Ottoman Turks. In other words, white slavery in the Ottoman Empire came to carry novel, negative connotations with the rise of the abolitionist movement.

As the West's attitude towards slavery changed, so did its perspective on the enslaved population of the Caucasus. The physical excellence of the Circassian beauty gave way to the anxieties following abolition in the Anglo-American sphere. The most striking example was the

¹⁶ Ergin, 74.

¹⁷ Baum, 156.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ergin, 49.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Baum, 126.

exhibition of Circassian beauties in freak shows as popularized by American showman P. T. Barnum in 1864. The “Circassian beauty”, who, in reality, was an American young woman seeking employment, had her hair washed in beer to make it look frizzy. Charles D. Martin names the hair of the Circassian beauty as “the ethnic kink”: “The ethnic kink supplied a visible bridge between the normalized, exalted whiteness that conferred citizenship and the distinguishing marks of racial difference that facilitated slavery. The emancipated white body still bore the evidence of its dark-bodied captivity.”²² Following the American Civil War, questions of citizenship and integration of the former slaves gained significance. The Circassian beauty with her distinct hair that denoted her slave status in exhibitions and freak shows calmed American anxieties about the integration of former slaves into the society and their political enfranchisement by showing the audience that slave status would manifest itself in the physical appearance of the enslaved.

1.2. Brief Overview of Caucasian Slavery in the Ottoman Empire in the Nineteenth Century

Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire was predominantly an urban phenomenon. Caucasian slaves were a minority among the rest of the slave population of the Ottoman Empire.²³ The demand for Caucasian slaves majorly came from the metropolitan élites of the Ottoman Empire since they alone had the financial means to afford a Caucasian slave. As Ehud Toledano suggests: “Circassian women often reached the harems of the urban upper-class of the Empire, not infrequently attaining positions of prestige and comfort as wives of middle- and upper-level functionaries.”²⁴ In that regard, Toledano distinguishes Caucasian slavery as the “*harem type*”

²² Charles D. Martin, *The White African American Body: A Cultural and Literary Exploration* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 104.

²³ Ehud R. Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 7.

²⁴ Ehud R. Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression, 1840-1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 8.

of slavery.²⁵ Although the final destination of Caucasian slaves arriving in the Ottoman Empire was generally the harem of an Ottoman élite, these white slaves from the Caucasus sometimes were purchased for domestic labor.²⁶

The typical route that Caucasian slaves arrived in the Ottoman Empire was through the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. During the Crimean War, the Porte banned the trade in Georgian slaves and discouraged the trade in Circassians.²⁷ However, the practice of kidnapping the people of the rival tribes to be sold as slaves among Circassians could not be dismantled. This practice continued after the Circassian forced migration to the Ottoman Empire in 1860's.²⁸ In addition to kidnapping, self-enslavement, child enslavement and slavery by birth were also the means through which Caucasian slavery was perpetuated.²⁹ There was also the tradition of acquiring young Circassian girls by the women of the Ottoman metropolitan élite to be raised for the harems of the same milieu.³⁰ Similarly, the Imperial Harem also boasted a considerable number of white slaves.

Due to the rise of abolitionist zeal in the West in the first half of the nineteenth century, especially in Britain, the institution of slavery in the Ottoman Empire began to attract criticism.³¹ This period also coincided with the growing influence of Western powers on Ottoman politics. The Western public demanded to know why their governments were involved with or became allies with the Ottoman Empire where slavery was sanctified by law. Slavery in the Ottoman Empire came under attack on many different grounds, such as the sinfulness of

²⁵ Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, 6-7.

²⁶ Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800–1909*, St. Antony's Series (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 186.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁸ Erdem, 46; See page 50 for reasons behind the continued practice of slavery through kidnapping after the Circassian exodus.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 50-54.

³⁰ Erdem, 120; Ceyda Karamürsel, "In the Age of Freedom, in the Name of Justice": Slaves, Slaveholders, and the State in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic, 1857-1933" PhD diss., (University of Pennsylvania: 2015), 120. Karamürsel likens this practice to *fancy trade* and *plaçage* in the American South.

³¹ On this topic, see Y. Hakan Erdem, "British Policy and Ottoman Slavery" in *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800–1909*, St. Antony's Series (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Ehud R. Toledano, "Slavery and Abolition: The Battle of Images" in *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998.

slavery. This long-standing Ottoman institution was also the target of criticism due to being seen as outdated in a period in which “abolition was increasingly associated with the modernizing and progressive liberal state”.³² Its presence was seen as a contradiction in the Ottoman Empire where reform after reform was implemented by the Porte in an effort to modernize. British abolitionists put pressure on their government to induce the Porte to abolish slavery and slave trade in the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Britain took on the role of the champion of abolitionism in the Middle East and the arbiter of restrictions put on slave trade in the Ottoman Empire. The Istanbul Slave Market was abolished in 1846 and slave trade in the Gulf area was suppressed in 1847. The West regarded these actions as the first concrete steps taken by the Porte towards the eradication of slavery.³³ Throughout the nineteenth century, especially after the Circassian exodus, the Porte kept taking measures to slowly eradicate the institution of Circassian slavery. The final step came in 1909 with the abolition of white slavery in the Ottoman Empire.

Although the Ottoman Empire complied with the British pressure to eradicate black slave trade, Caucasian slavery and slave trade were different matters. British officials who urged the Ottoman Empire to restrict white slave trade were met with staunch opposition by the bureaucratic élite. Toledano suggests that white slavery and slave trade were problems that the Ottoman Empire struggled to resolve on its own initiative.³⁴ The reason why Western pressure to abolish white slavery in the Ottoman Empire often fell on deaf ears was that the presence of white slaves in one’s harem was a status symbol. Moreover, the modernization efforts by the Porte in the nineteenth century, coupled with increased Western encroachment on Ottoman territory and the disillusionment with the West led to a conviction of moral superiority over the West as a defense mechanism in the Ottoman mind. Nevertheless, white slavery and polygamy slowly came to be regarded by Ottoman intellectuals such as Halil Halid as the vestiges of an

³² Peter Hinks, John McKivigan, *Encyclopedia of Antislavery and Abolition, Volumes 1 & 2* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), xiv.

³³ Erdem, 39.

³⁴ See Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*.

ancien régime that were out of touch with the realities of the modern world. The 1909 ban on white slavery was the final nail in the coffin of Caucasian slavery.

1.3. Literature Review

There is a proliferation of literature related to slavery and slave trade in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. Ehud R. Toledano's works particularly stand out in this field. His book *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression: 1840-1890* was published in 1983 and it has held sway since then. Chapters III, IV and V deal with the Circassian slave trade. Chapter III, titled "The Road to Prohibition: Anglo-Ottoman Contacts Regarding the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1840-1855", demonstrates the extent of the abolitionist policies pursued by the British in the Ottoman Empire. The fifteen-year period that this chapter deals with witnessed the intensification of British demands from the Porte to put an end to Circassian slave trade following the waning of Russian influence in the region and increased Ottoman dependence on Britain during the Crimean War. This chapter also includes Toledano's observations about the British perception of Circassian slavery in the Ottoman Empire:

On the British side, perceptions differed considerably. At the time, the Foreign Office still saw the struggle for the suppression of the slave trade in the Ottoman Empire as a one-dimensional issue. A simplistic view of slavery in the Empire prevailed: a slave was a slave, regardless of color, origin, or usage. Certainly, all white slaves were in one and the same category, Georgian or Circassian, and the complexity of the situation entirely escaped British policy-makers.³⁵

The following chapter "Prohibition and Resignation— The African Versus the Caucasian Traffic in the Late 1850s" contrasts how the Porte complied with British demands with regard to the suppression of the African slave trade and how it disregarded British pressure to do the same in the Black Sea to eradicate the Circassian slave trade. As a result, Britain came to realize that efforts to stop the Circassian slave trade would not bear fruit easily. Chapter V explores the domestic policies pursued by the Porte without British interference with regard to

³⁵ Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, 123.

the Circassian slave trade as its title suggests: “Circassian Slavery and Slave Trade— an Ottoman Solution”.

Toledano’s first book about nineteenth century slavery in the Ottoman Empire was followed by his *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* which was published in 1998. This work aims to bridge the gap between studies that focus solely on the history of slavery in the Ottoman Empire and a larger literature that deals with slavery through a global perspective, as Toledano claims.³⁶ In the Introduction, Toledano summarizes the Western perception of slavery in the Ottoman Empire: “In the nineteenth century, Europeans and Americans had a rather undifferentiated view of slavery, tending to universalize the condition of the plantation slaves in the United States South and leave no room for alternative, milder manifestations of slavery.”³⁷ Toledano then discusses scholarly literature about non-American slavery to demonstrate that the debate about whether “alternative, milder manifestations of slavery” existed has persisted in academia, which offers a range of secondary sources on slavery.

Another work on slavery in the Ottoman Empire, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise 1800-1909*, was authored by Y. Hakan Erdem and published in 1996. Erdem differs from Toledano with the example he gives to illustrate his point that “most observers of Ottoman society, both foreign and native, regarded Ottoman slavery as essentially different from its counterparts elsewhere. Comparisons with slavery in the antebellum American South was a favourite theme.”³⁸ Erdem quotes Stratford Canning, the British ambassador to the Porte, whose statement Erdem claims is “typical”³⁹:

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

³⁶ Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, Preface.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁸ Erdem, 62.

³⁹ Erdem, 62.

court favourite or affluent functionary.⁴⁰

The quotation provided by Erdem demonstrates that Western observers were able to mark the differences between Ottoman slaves and “plantation slaves in the United States South”.⁴¹

These works by Toledano and Erdem are seminal in that they offer an extensive account of slavery and slave trade in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Toledano and Erdem both exclude or only briefly touch upon the American attitudes towards white slavery in the Ottoman Empire in their works. Toledano mainly focuses on the British efforts to end slavery and slave trade in the Ottoman Empire while largely excluding the support given by the American legation in Constantinople. In his treatment of the British advocacy for the eradication of slavery and slave trade, Toledano does not discuss the British abolitionist rhetoric in Britain as much as he discusses the abolitionist policies pursued by Palmerston and Canning. Similarly, Erdem deals very briefly with the American attitudes towards slavery in the Ottoman Empire. An interesting aspect of Erdem’s work is that it goes against what Toledano claims about the uniformity of the Western understanding of non-American slavery. Erdem demonstrates that distinctions between Ottoman slavery and American slavery did not go unnoticed by observers.

The scholarly literature that focuses on Ottoman slavery and abolitionism also include Ceyda Karamürsel’s dissertation “‘In the Age of Freedom, in the Name of Justice’: Slaves, Slaveholders, and the State in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic, 1857-1933”, Toledano’s chapter “Abolition and Anti-slavery in the Ottoman Empire: A Case to Answer?” in *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century* and Ferguson and Toledano’s chapter “Ottoman Slavery and Abolition in the Nineteenth Century” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*. These works provide a solid background in the practice of slavery and slave trade in the Ottoman Empire.

Since this thesis focuses on the Western perception of the race of Ottoman Turks as

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, 15.

shaped by the West's understanding of Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire, it refers to literature on the history of perceptions. Robert J. Allison's *The Crescent Obscured, The United States and the Muslim World 1776 - 1815* is a seminal work that explores the conventionally held beliefs and assumptions about the Ottoman Empire prior to the change in Western perception brought about by the Tanzimat in the nineteenth century. The chapter "American Slavery and the Muslim World" covers a period before the American abolitionists directed their attention to Circassian slavery, but it is still an illuminating chapter that sets an example. Timothy Marr's *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* tackles similar questions albeit covering a larger period. The chapter "Antebellum Islamicism and the transnational crusade of antislavery and temperance reform" particularly gives insight about the American abolitionist discourse and its attitude towards slavery in the Orient. Marr does not focus on Circassian slavery but he raises important points about the topic in general. Most importantly, Murat Ergin's *"Is the Turk a White Man?": Race and Modernity in the Making of Turkish Identity* deals extensively with how the nineteenth century concept of race applied to Turks.

On the European perception of the Ottoman Empire, Aslı Çırakman's *From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe": European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth* stands out. She devotes a brief section called "Perspectives and Interests: The Theme of Slavery" to the question of how Europeans saw the slavery institution in the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, this section forgoes Circassian slavery as well.

As for the history of race science, this study refers to a multitude of seminal works in the field. Bruce Baum's *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race* tells the story of the concept of the Caucasian race from its invention to the present day and how this racial category was used politically by the West. He argues that race science became popularized in the nineteenth century and found a place for itself within popular discourse. *The Invention of Race* edited by Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David and Dominic Thomas is also an invaluable source in relation to

the history of the concept of race and how its evolved form of race science became popularized and institutionalized in the nineteenth century. Both of these works argue that race science influenced cultural and intellectual discussions.

Taken together, the works cited above help to provide a solid background from where further research can be conducted. Although this thesis does not directly refer to the entirety of the works mentioned above, it nevertheless follows in the footsteps of the researchers who authored these foundational works. The *raison d'être* of this thesis is that none of the works cited above deal directly with the questions that it aims to answer. One can arrive at a solid understanding of what the West thought about Caucasian slavery and the race of Ottoman Turks only as separate issues through an analysis of the existing secondary literature. This thesis aims to analyze the Western perception of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks and Caucasian slavery as two bilaterally influential topics. Caucasian slaves were white, and they were mainly employed as domestic slaves or concubines. In the nineteenth century, when the West saw the rest of the world through a scientifically racist lens, the presence of Caucasian slaves further complicated the question of who exactly an Ottoman Turk in terms of race was and whether he was racially Caucasian or not.

1.4. The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter I briefly sketches out the development of the concept of race and race science, and Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. “Ottoman Turks” refers to the Turkish speaking Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Western writers generally used the term “the Turk”. Throughout the thesis, “Ottoman Turks” is preferred so as to distinguish non-minority subjects of the Ottoman Empire from the rest of the Turkic peoples and citizens of the modern day Turkish Republic. Western writers were convinced of the Asian origins of Ottoman Turks historically and linguistically, although they used differing terms such as Mongolian, Turanian, Mongoloid, Asiatic, etc. This

thesis prefers the terms “Asian” and “Asiatic”, and employs them interchangeably throughout.

Chapter II deals with the paradoxical effect of Caucasian slavery on the racial identity of Ottoman Turks. It argues that Caucasian slavery was cited as the reason why Ottoman Turks looked Caucasian but its perceived prevalence in the Ottoman Empire was seen as a sign that Ottoman Turks were not Caucasian on a civilizational and cultural level. It also discusses the reforms restricting slave trade in the Ottoman Empire with relation to their influence on the Western understanding of the race of Ottoman Turks.

Chapter III focuses on the racial impurity of Ottoman Turks and how it found a place for itself within Western discussions about miscegenation. It argues that the West often regarded the case of the racial impurity of Ottoman Turks as an example while debating on the possible advantages or disadvantages of racial intermingling. In seeking an answer to the enigma of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks, the progeny of racial intermingling in the Ottoman Empire also became the subject of racialist discussions.

This study relies on a vast array of primary sources from newspaper articles to congressional speeches, from race science books to travel writing. The reason for this variety is that the thesis also aims to show that race science found a significant place for itself within popular discourse in the nineteenth century. The question of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks was not limited to scientific circles. Therefore, studying the West’s perception of the race of Ottoman Turks cannot limit itself to scientific material. Moreover, Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire was also as diversely written about as racialism. This thesis aims to analyze primary sources which combine the racialist discussions about Ottoman Turks and Caucasian slavery, and discuss the relationship between the two.

CHAPTER II: “THE TURK NEVER CAN REFORM”⁴²: THE CAUCASIAN RACE AND THE PARADOXICAL EFFECT OF CAUCASIAN SLAVE TRADE ON THE RACE OF OTTOMAN TURKS

Following the footsteps of the proponents of racialism of the eighteenth century, nineteenth century raciologists developed novel methods to differentiate between races based on physical and anatomical differences. The shape of the skull and the nose, the structure of the face and the body and the color of the skin were widely considered to be indicators of where a group of people belonged in terms of race. Contemporaneous with the popularization of the use of physical indicators for racial categorization was the pervasion of the notion of the superiority of the Caucasian race. As racialism took a more hierarchical and pseudoscientifically racist turn, the question of who was Caucasian and who was not became more significant than ever. Racially categorizing Ottoman Turks proved to be a conundrum for the proponents of race science. Raciologists were left with two contradictory indicators of race where Ottoman Turks were concerned: the Caucasian appearance of Ottoman Turks on the one hand and the historically Asiatic origin of Ottoman Turks on the other. The answer to the question of how a group of people of historically and linguistically Asiatic origin could have a Caucasian physical appearance was often found in Caucasian slavery. Racialism generally adhered to the assumption that the intermingling of Ottoman Turks and Caucasian slaves resulted in the changed physical appearance of Ottoman Turks. Since the Caucasian race was universally acknowledged to be the superior one, the change that occurred in the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks as a result of their intermingling with Caucasian slaves was presented as a positive change.

However, the altered physical appearance of the citizens of the Ottoman Empire of

⁴² Edward Augustus Freeman, *Lectures to American Audiences* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1882), 422.

Turkish origin was not enough on its own for Ottoman Turks to be admitted to the ranks of the Caucasian race proper. Racialism did not solely rely on physical indicators of race. Cultural practices, types of governance, laws and customs, religion and differences in attitudes towards hotly debated moral and ethical questions of the nineteenth century such as slavery and abolition were also considered in determining the race of a group of people. This was where the paradoxical effect of Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire on the race of Ottoman Turks could be best observed. While racialist thought generally accepted Caucasian slave trade to be the reason why Ottoman Turks looked Caucasian, it also regarded the persistence of Caucasian slavery as a symptom of cultural and civilizational backwardness. In short, Caucasian slavery both made and marred the “Caucasianness” of Ottoman Turks. Where such an ambiguity existed, it was inevitable that popular discourse would also be puzzled with regards to the exact place occupied by Ottoman Turks in racial categories. The popular discourse placed and displaced Ottoman Turks constantly in the hierarchy of races corresponding to the political and diplomatic developments in the long nineteenth century.

2.1. Ottoman Turks and the Caucasian Race

Where Ottoman Turks fit into the racial hierarchy in Western scientific and popular discourses was an enigmatic subject. Earlier race scientists in the eighteenth century and the inheritors of their legacy in the nineteenth century differed in opinion. Meiners classified Ottoman Turks as part of the Caucasian race.⁴³ Blumenbach was also of the same opinion as Meiners regarding the racial identity of Ottoman Turks. He wrote a scientific atlas, *Abbildungen naturhistorischer Gegenstände*, in 1796. This work included illustrations of members of Blumenbach’s quinary system of races (American, Caucasian, Malaysian, Mongolian and Ethiopian). Blumenbach chose the Ottoman diplomat Yusuf Agah Efendi as his Caucasian subject.⁴⁴ This choice was

⁴³ Baum, 85.

⁴⁴ Sara Eigen. “Self, Race, and Species: J. F. Blumenbach’s Atlas Experiment.” *The German Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2005): 277–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30039411>. pp. 288.

interesting considering that Blumenbach admitted that he could have chosen “a Milton, or a Raphael”.⁴⁵ Yusuf Agah Efendi was preferred to Milton or Raphael because his home, the Ottoman Empire, was closer to the geographical region which gave its name to the Caucasian race.⁴⁶ In a similar vein, French naturalist Georges Cuvier, British physiologist William Lawrence and French physiologist Louis-Antoine Desmoulins also classified Ottoman Turks as Caucasian, while placing them in the lower ranks of the hierarchy within the Caucasian race.⁴⁷

As the nineteenth century progressed, developments in linguistic and historical research muddied the waters with regards to the racial identity of Ottoman Turks. Their initial classification as Caucasian was questioned due to their supposed Asiatic origin. Within the community of race science, a transatlantic challenge to the view that Ottoman Turks belonged in the Caucasian race came from American physician Samuel George Morton. Morton studied and traveled in Europe, and developed an interest in craniology. He published his first major work *Crania Americana* in 1839.⁴⁸ Morton advocated for a threefold system to distinguish between the races of the world: Caucasian, Mongolian and Ethiopian. In the Mortonian racial hierarchy, the Caucasian race was superior and Ottoman Turks did not belong in its ranks. They were grouped together under the Mongolian race. However, Morton also acknowledged the ambiguity of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks:

The primitive Turks appear to have been a Mongol nation; but their rapid conquest of some of the fairest portions of the Caucasian region, and their early amalgamation with the Circassians, Georgians, Greeks, and Arabs, has totally changed their physical character, and rendered them a handsome people.⁴⁹

Morton added a footnote to the paragraph quoted above: “This fact has led some writers to

⁴⁵ Eigen, 288.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Baum, 105-6.

⁴⁸ Robert A. Smith., "Types of Mankind: Polygenism and Scientific Racism in the Nineteenth Century United States Scientific Community." PhD. diss., (Pittsburg State University, 2014), pp. 31.

⁴⁹ Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana: Or a Comparatif View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of America* (London: James Madden, & Co., 1839), 43.

class the Turks with the Caucasians, and to doubt the Mongol origin of the parent stock”.⁵⁰ Morton went against the earlier classification of Ottoman Turks as part of the Caucasian race and gave emphasis to their “Mongolian” origin. He found evidence for his claim in the physical appearance of contemporary Turks:

The modern Turks are of a middling stature, with an athletic form and well proportioned limbs: the head is round, the eyes dark and animated, and the whole face expressive and intelligent; while the short nose and open nostrils are indicative of Mongol extraction.⁵¹

Morton differentiated between “modern Turks” and ancient Turks who supposedly looked “Mongolian” to the fullest. Although Morton did not see a complete cosmetic transformation towards a fully Caucasian appearance in “modern Turks”, he nevertheless saw enough change to differentiate between Turks of the present and the past. Morton’s *Crania Americana* gave impetus to the infiltration of race science into popular discourse. It also became “the standard tool of reference for ethnologists and natural historians with an interest in humanity’s origins”.⁵²

Among Morton’s protégés were South Carolinian slave-owner surgeon Josiah Clark Nott and British-American Egyptologist George Gliddon. Nott and Gliddon co-edited *Indigenous Races of the Earth* in 1857. They addressed the ambiguity surrounding the racial origins of Ottoman Turks and stressed that Ottoman Turks shared more similarities with Europeans:

Through the skulls of Osmanli Turks and and the Tartars of the Kasan - especially the latter - the Turkish head proper graduates into the European form. Both these tribes are among the most anciently civilized of the race. The high European forms so often seen among the Osmanlis are no longer problematic. A knowledge of the heterogeneous additions accepted by their Seldjukian ancestors, and already referred to in sufficient detail, has served not a little to dissipate the mystery attached to this subject. Of the genealogical impurity of the Turks I think there can be but little doubt.⁵³

⁵⁰ Morton, 43.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Smith, 33.

⁵³ Josiah Clark Nott, George Robins Gliddon, *Indigenous Races of the Earth: Or, New Chapters of Ethnological Inquiry; Including Monographs on Special Departments Contributed by Alfred Maury, Francis Pulszky, and J. Aitken Meigs. Presenting Fresh Investigations, Documents, and Materials*

American school of racialist thought established that Ottoman Turks were originally a part of the Mongolian race while possessing “genealogical impurity” due to their contacts with the Caucasian race. This genealogical impurity resulted in the changed physical composition of Ottoman Turks. Nott and Gliddon saw more Caucasian characteristics in the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks than did Morton.

Arthur de Gobineau was of the same opinion as Morton, Nott and Gliddon regarding the racial impurity of “such a mixed people as the Turks”.⁵⁴ Gobineau’s *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* also bore witness to the contemporary discussion regarding the origins of Ottoman Turks. Gobineau mentioned that “linguistic arguments” were made to link Ottoman Turks to Finns (who were considered to be of Asian origin), of which Gobineau himself was not entirely convinced.⁵⁵

Although initially classified as Caucasian by earlier proponents of race science, Ottoman Turks posed challenges to those who endeavored to place them in a racial category as the nineteenth century progressed. Newly developed fields such as craniology and phrenology, coupled with the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks, pointed to “Caucasianness”. However, race science was not so quick to grant “Caucasianness” to Ottoman Turks in light of contemporary historical and linguistic analyses. They were generally held to be a Caucasian-looking group of people with an Asian origin. The uncertainty among race scientists regarding the racial identity of Ottoman Turks left ample room for debate in scientific and popular discourses.

2.2. The Impact of Caucasian Slave Trade on the Race of Ottoman Turks

Historical and linguistic inquiries into the racial origin of Ottoman Turks yielded results which

(Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1857), 273-274.

⁵⁴ Arthur de Gobineau, *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (London: Ostara Publications, 2016), 131.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

suggested that Ottoman Turks may have been of Asian origin. These findings contrasted sharply with the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks and their craniological, phrenological and physical similarity to the members of the Caucasian race. Solving the mystery of this discrepancy proved to be a challenging task. Race scientists and members of the public often attempted to find the answer in the heterogeneous nature of Ottoman society. The white slave trade from the Caucasus region into Ottoman Empire's metropolitan centers was cited as one of the reasons why Ottoman Turks appeared so differently from their supposed ancestors. This line of argument held that the intermingling of Ottoman Turks with the victims of the Caucasian slave trade resulted in a change of Ottoman Turks towards a more Caucasian physical appearance. The race science community and the public often adhered to an Orientalist perspective regarding the harem and the "Circassian beauty" stereotype while discussing the altering effect of the Caucasian slave trade on the race of Ottoman Turks, often straying far from the reality of sociocultural dynamics of the Ottoman Empire in that period. Most importantly, the extent to which Caucasian slave ownership in the Ottoman Empire was commonplace was exaggerated in the West.

The influx of Caucasian domestic slaves into the Ottoman Empire through the Caucasian slave trade was common knowledge in the nineteenth century. Coupled with the generally held belief that the peoples inhabiting the Caucasus region possessed remarkable physical beauty, the Caucasian slave trade was often the given answer to the question of how Ottoman Turks physically differed from other members of the Mongolian race. This supposed alteration in the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks complicated matters further as scientific racism gained momentum through the nineteenth century. If a change in the physical appearance of a group of people was considered possible, the next question that followed was whether a similar change could occur in culture and civilization. In other words, the ambiguity of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks complexified assumptions about the supposed racially determined cultural and civilizational levels of the peoples of the world.

Samuel George Morton praised Circassians and Georgians for their “personal beauty” in

Crania Americana:

The [Circassian] women have attracted the attention and commanded the admiration of all travellers; nor can there be a question in exquisite beauty of form and gracefulness of manner, they surpass all other people. They are distinguished by fair skin, arched and narrow eyebrows, very long eyelashes, and black eyes and hair. Their profile approaches nearest the Grecian model, and falls little short of the beau-ideal of classical sculpture. (...) The Georgians are not less beautiful than the Circassians, possessing the same style of features, but a darker complexion.⁵⁶

While Morton held that Circassians “seldom sell their own women to the Turks” contrary to popular belief, it was by “unfortunate captives from different provinces of Georgia” instead that the Caucasian slave trade was supported.⁵⁷ As mentioned above, Morton was of the opinion that the “amalgamation” of Turks with various peoples including Circassians and Georgians “totally changed their physical character, and rendered them a handsome people”.⁵⁸

Nott and Gliddon did not stray too far away from Morton’s views regarding the peoples of the Caucasus in their *Indigenous Races of the Earth*:

In the mountainous but fertile region of the Caucasus, extending from the Euxine to the Caspian Seas, dwell numerous tribes, speaking mutually unintelligible languages, and differing in physical characters. From this region were the harems of the Turk and Persian supplied with those beautiful Georgian and Circassian females, who have, to no small extent, imparted their physical excellence to the former people.⁵⁹

Again, Georgian and Circassian women were credited for the alteration in the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks. Proponents of race science sometimes differed in opinion with regard to which Caucasian ethnicity was responsible for the improvement in the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks. Circassians and Georgians came to the fore, with minor disagreements in the race science circles as to whether the former or the latter might have had the greater influence.

⁵⁶ Morton, 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Morton, 43.

⁵⁹ Nott and Gliddon, 315.

Although the positive influence of Caucasians on the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks was generally accepted in racist circles, the race science community did not uniformly agree that inhabitants of the Caucasus region could be credited for the improved physical appearance of their immediate neighbors. Even the naming of the superior race after the Caucasus came under attack. *The Ethnological Journal*, which was published in London, criticized Blumenbach for popularizing the term “Caucasian”:

Blumenbach, the originator of the present classification of the races of man, founded on the shape of the skull, imagined all mankind to have consisted, originally, of a single race, from which sprang, as mere varieties, all the other races such as we now find them. His notion was that the primordial stock was the white man, but as, even here, there existed considerable variety, it became necessary to select the purest type. In his domestic Golgotha there happened to be a single skull of a Georgian female; and, coupling this very small fact with the reputation for beauty enjoyed by Georgian and Circassian slaves among the ugly Turks, he jumped at once to the conclusion that the original seat of man in the perfection of his form was not Greece or Italy, but the mountaineous region which lies between the Euxine and the Caspian, and hence the term Caucasian. (...) It seems never to have occurred to him [Blumenbach] that mountaineers are generally homekeeping and unenterprising, and that the very people referred to, now, as in all known times, sheer barbarians, are known beyond their own limits only as purchased slaves.⁶⁰

The generally held belief that inhabitants of the Caucasus region were beautiful was openly challenged. Even their place within the Caucasian race was questioned. If the inhabitants of the Caucasus were “sheer barbarians” and their beauty was but a myth, how could they have made “ugly Turks” more Caucasian-looking and civilized? Nevertheless, despite the criticism from *The Ethnological Journal*, the name “Caucasian” for the superior race has remained in use.

Doubts surrounding the credibility of the view that cited intermingling with Circassians and Georgians as the reason behind the non-Mongolian appearance of Ottoman Turks was not limited to counter arguments proposed in *The Ethnological Journal*. *The Eclectic Magazine* reprinted an article from *The Edinburgh Review* titled “Ethnology, or the Science of Races”. The article aimed to explain the change in the cranial structure of several non-Caucasian groups

⁶⁰ “On the Terms Caucasian, Aryan, and Turanian in Ethnology” *The Ethnological Journal: a Monthly Record of Ethnological Research and Criticism*, 3 (1865), 121-122, pp. 121.

of people by attributing this change to cultural improvement rather than intermingling with the Caucasian race:

One of the most striking examples, perhaps, is afforded by the cranial conformation of the Turks of Europe and Western Asia. It closely resembles that of the great bulk of the European nations: departing so widely from that of the Turks of Central Asia that many writers have referred the former to the Caucasian rather than to the Mongolian stock. Yet historical evidence sufficiently proves, that the Western Turks originally belong to the Northern Asiatic group of nations, with which the Eastern portion of their nation still remains associated, not only in its geographical position, but in its physical characters and habits of life: and that it is in the Western branch, not in the Eastern, that the change has taken place. Some writers have supposed that this change, from the pyramidal to the elliptical form of skull, might be explained as the result of an intermixture of the Turkish race with that of the countries they have conquered, or by the introduction of Georgian and Circassian slaves into their harems. But the cause suggested is plainly inadequate to the effect. For we know that in the Christian countries subjugated by the Turks, the conquering and the conquered races have been kept separate by mutual hatred, fostered by their difference in religion and manners: while any improvement effected by the introduction of Georgian and Circassian slaves must have been confined to the higher classes, who alone could afford to purchase them. In either case the assigned cause, even if admitted to the utmost possible extent, would have merely produced a hybrid or intermediate race, instead of effecting the phenomenon for which we have to account - the entire substitution of a new type for the original one. So complete a change we can scarcely attribute to any other cause than civilization and social improvement; the constant tendency of which is to smooth down the awkward prominences both of the pyramidal and the prognathous skulls, and bring them towards the symmetry of the elliptical. The Eastern Turks, retaining the nomadic habits of their ancestors, have retained also their cranial conformation.⁶¹

The “elliptical” cranial structure was that of the Caucasian race. The article countered the view that the Caucasian slave trade played a key role in the cranial change in Ottoman Turks by claiming that only the wealthy Ottoman Turks had sufficient financial means to purchase Caucasian slaves. In that regard, the article made a comment on Caucasian slavery that was more in touch with the historical reality of that institution in the Ottoman Empire. According to the article, an “improvement” in cranial structure “towards the symmetry of the elliptical” skull was directly proportional to “social improvement”. The article used the word “improvement” to

⁶¹ "Ethnology, or the Science of Races," *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, 16 (1849), 55-87, at pp. 60-61.

describe the change in Ottoman Turkish cranial structure, thus creating a hierarchy which placed the possessors of an elliptical skull at the top. It was possible to reach to the highest stratum of this hierarchy by attaining a greater level of “civilization” and promoting “social improvement”. The place of a group of people on the racial hierarchy was not fixed. From this point of view, the article displayed an attitude that was out of touch with the emerging scientific racism of the nineteenth century: adopting certain practices that were considered to be Caucasian-like could make a group of people look more Caucasian as well.

Nevertheless, arguments that questioned the magnitude of the role played by the Caucasian slave trade in altering the racial identity of Ottoman Turks remained few and far between. Orientalist imaginings of Ottoman harems filled with possessors of the fabled “Circassian beauty” persisted throughout the nineteenth century in popular discourse. New terms like “Caucasian” coined by race science found their place in writings touching on Ottoman Turks and the Caucasian slave trade. *Encyclopædia Americana* published in 1835 described Georgians and Circassians in following words: “Many of the tribes are distinguished for the beauty, symmetry and strength of their frames, particularly the Circassians and Georgians, who are the handsomest people in the world; hence the charming Circassian and Georgian females are sought for by the Eastern monarchs for their harems”.⁶² The British travel writer John Reid visited the Ottoman Empire in 1838 and published the account of his travels in 1840. He physiognomically divided Ottoman Turks into three different groups:

Any one who has paid even slight attention to physiognomy will, after a short residence in Turkey, perceive that the Turks belong to three essentially different classes. I. The original Turk, or Mongol; II. The modern Turk, or Caucasian; and III. The mongrel Turk, or mixed breed. The first class are the pure descendants of those Tatars who, many centuries ago, left Tatory in advance of Genghis Khan. The second class, and by far the most numerous in Constantinople, are those who are descendants of Greek, Circassian, and other renegades, by Circassian and Greek women; the third class being descendants of Turks by Circassian and Greek women, or of Greek renegades by Turkish women. The Mongol Turk is by far the most numerous in Turkey, and the most indolent: his

⁶² Francis Lieber, Edward Wigglesworth, Thomas Gamaliel Bradford, *Encyclopædia Americana* (Boston: Desilver, Thomas, & Company, 1835), 10.

stature is generally short, frame thick set, complexion dark with a round face, thickish lips, distant eyes, and sunk features. The Caucasian Turk, on the contrary, is taller, has a longer forehead, well formed face, aquiline nose, short upper lip, full chin, and clear complexion; while the mixed or mongrel Turk is allied or distant from either of the two first classes in proportion as his descent is of remote or modern relation.⁶³

Reid's usage of words like "Caucasian" and "Mongol" were indicators of the popularity of race science. Reid differed from race scientists in a significant aspect. As a traveler to the Ottoman Empire, Reid had the opportunity to observe the physical characteristics of various Ottoman Turks. Instead of grouping all the Turkish subjects of the Ottoman Empire together, he made the attempt to distinguish between those inhabiting urban centers and rural areas. While acknowledging the physically altering effects of Circassians in Ottoman Turks, Reid did not attribute this alteration to the entire Ottoman Turkish population. In this sense, his observations are more in line with those of the article from *The Eclectic Journal*. Another interesting aspect was that Reid claimed that urban Turks were predominantly "Caucasian" or "modern". He underlined the link between modernity and race.

In a similar vein, the American writer John Milton Mackie cited the Caucasian slave trade as the reason behind the changed physical appearance of Ottoman Turks in his *Life of Schamyl: And Narrative of the Circassian War of Independence* which was published in 1856: "(...) and to the Circassian trade in female slaves is to be traced the superiority, both of physiognomy and of blood, which belongs to the modern Turk above the Tartar of the steppe and of the desert."⁶⁴ According to Mackie, "Circassian trade in female slaves" in the Ottoman Empire resulted in the superiority of the "modern Turk above the Tartar of the steppe and of the desert".

The majority of writers dealing with the question of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks mentioned Caucasian slave trade as having had a positive impact on the physical appearance of

⁶³ John Reid, *Turkey and the Turks: Being the Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (London: R. Tyas, 1840), 100-101.

⁶⁴ John Milton Mackie, *Life of Schamyl; and Narrative of the Circassian War of Independence* (Boston: J.P. Pewett and Company, 1856), 114.

Ottoman Turks. This did not mean that Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire was seen as a positive institution. Towards the second half of the nineteenth century, abolitionist discourse gained prominence in the West. Caucasian slave trade came under attack from Anglo-American abolitionists. The Sublime Porte responded to these abolitionist attacks by taking measures to restrict the slave trade. Initially credited as the reason behind the physical change in Ottoman Turks, Caucasian slave trade now posed the question as to whether a cultural change could occur in Ottoman Turks as well. It was generally held that if the Ottoman government could take effective action against preventing the influx of Caucasian slaves into the empire, then it could prove that Ottoman Turks could belong in the higher ranks of the racial hierarchy whose other members were also taking similar steps thanks to a rise in abolitionist fervor. The anti-slavery actions of the Porte became a yardstick with which to gauge the readiness of Ottoman Turks to join the rest of the “modern” races of the world.

2.3. Race Science, Reform and Slavery in the Ottoman Empire

The process of the complete eradication of the institution of slavery in the Ottoman Empire spanned the nineteenth century and beyond into the early twentieth century due to multifaceted reasons. Throughout this process of the dying out of this ancient institution, slavery came under attack from many different fronts in the West. While criticizing slavery in the Ottoman Empire, Western writers made remarks about the unmodern, uncivilized nature of slavery and how it was an impediment to the modernization efforts of the Porte. Moreover, the perceived reluctance of the Porte to abolish slavery altogether was seen as a sign of the unpreparedness of Ottoman Turks to reach the level of modernity and civilization that had been attained by Caucasian races. This line of thought often provided fuel for deterministic interpretations of race science about the uncivilized nature of Ottoman Turks. On the other hand, the gradual implementation of anti-slavery reforms by the Porte were seen as markers of modernity and civilization by those who held less rigid and less essentialist views about the so-called capacity

of Ottoman Turks to reach a higher level on the racial and civilizational hierarchy.

The General Anti-Slavery Convention was held in London in June 1840. Dr. John Bowring, who was the delegate for Exeter, gave a speech on the slavery in the Middle East. Even though he acknowledged that slaves were “not regarded as degraded”, Dr. Bowring still saw slavery as “the great impediment to civilization, to the march of instruction, to the introduction and the progress of civil liberty”.⁶⁵ In 1856, British abolitionists and their supporters in the Parliament addressed a memorial to Palmerston which demanded the abolition of slavery and slave trade in the Ottoman Empire. The memorial described slaveholding as “utterly incompatible with the present advanced state of civilization”.⁶⁶ In British abolitionist thought, the link between civilization and abolitionism was firmly established. As long as the Porte resisted the British urgings to abolish slavery and slave trade, it could not claim its place among the civilized nations.

Denouncing slavery as an “impediment to civilization” inherently contained implications about other societies where slavery was legal, such as the United States. The British writer Charles White was aware of such implications as he made it clear in his book *Three Years in Constantinople*:

In the general outcry raised against Turkey, resulting too often from political objects or religious prejudices, launched forth in most instances also by men who have had little opportunity and less disposition to study or judge the national character impartially, slavery is denounced as a proof of the merciless barbarity of the people, of their inveterate hostility to civilization and reform, nay, as an excuse for partitioning the empire. But, if this be admitted by way of hypothesis, it falls as a keen reproof upon half the population of the United States, and may be employed as a cutting reproach to a vast body of Frenchmen, who would fain rush to war with Great Britain, in order to frustrate British efforts for suppressing the very practice which these pseudo-philanthropists most violently condemn.⁶⁷

White commented on how abolitionist arguments regarding the linkage between civilization

⁶⁵ Erdem, 69.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁶⁷ Charles White, *Three Years in Constantinople: or, Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1844* (London: Henry Colburn, 1846), 311.

and abolition could be extrapolated outside the Ottoman Empire to the Western slaveholding societies. He was of the opinion that abolitionist arguments ran the risk of branding the United States or France as uncivilized as well.

Since denouncing slavery as uncivilized altogether ran the risk of branding those Western nations where slavery was still sanctified by law as uncivilized, a number of Westerners writing on slavery in the Ottoman Empire tried to distinguish it from slavery in the West. They made comparisons between Ottoman slavery and American slavery. In the first half of the nineteenth century, agricultural slavery was not as common as it would be in the second half of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire. This led Westerners to observe only the domestic and the *kul* types of slavery in the Ottoman Empire, often arriving at conclusions that found Ottoman slavery more benign than American slavery.⁶⁸ That being said, it should be noted that with what motivation these comparisons were made is also important. Comparisons between Ottoman slavery and American slavery, if made by abolitionists, tended to highlight the cruelty of American slavery while understating the cruelty of Ottoman slavery.

The Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society published in 1847 made one such comparison between Ottoman slavery and American slavery:

Slavery in Turkey never exhibited so refined cruelty as is seen in Christian America. Lieutenant Lynch remarks:
“By a law of the Ottoman Empire, no one within its limits can be held in Slavery for a period exceeding seven years... In Turkey, every colored person employed by the Government receives monthly wages; and if a slave is emancipated at the expiration of seven years, then he becomes eligible to any office beneath the sovereignty.”⁶⁹

Another similar argument favoring Ottoman slavery over American slavery was made in 1854 by William Deans in his *History of the Ottoman Empire: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time*:

Slaves are daily decreasing in number; and the open slave-traffic is prohibited through the Ottoman empire. The slave is allowed to be a

⁶⁸ Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*, 133.

⁶⁹ *The Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York: The A & F Anti-Slavery Society, 1849), 146.

witness in a law court, and has equal rights before the law with his master. The slave may rise to an eminent position in the state, and is not, as in America, a creature to be universally shunned.⁷⁰

Comparisons like these undermined the plight of slaves in the Ottoman Empire for the sake of argument. Abolitionists added shock value to their arguments by contrasting the institution of slavery in the uncivilized Ottoman Empire to slavery in the civilized United States. This contrast served the purpose of highlighting the irony that even uncivilized Ottomans treated their slaves better than civilized Americans. The notion that slavery in the East was more benign than slavery in the West seeped into academic discussions and persisted throughout most of the twentieth century.⁷¹

The abolitionist comparisons between Ottoman slavery and American slavery did not go unanswered by anti-abolitionists. The American press was where such a debate took place in 1854. In response to a *The New York Times* article which found white slavery in the Ottoman Empire to be more benign than slavery in the American south, *Washington Sentinel* published the following words: Surely that mind must be woefully perverted which cannot draw a distinction between the Circassian *slave trade* and *slavery* as it exists in the Southern States. But the *New York Times* looks upon the Circassian *slave trade* with more tolerance than upon African *slavery*.⁷² *Washington Sentinel*'s reasoning behind the incomparableness between Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire and African slavery in the United States was based on race: "The Circassian is a white man. He is a Caucasian - he belongs to that race which is the superior race of the world. The Negro on the other hand belongs to an inferior species, whose organization shows that he was made for slavery, whilst experience shows that he has

⁷⁰ William Deans, *History of the Ottoman Empire: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Edinburgh: A. Fullarton, 1854), 316.

⁷¹ On this topic, see Ehud R. Toledano, "Introduction: Ottoman Slavery and the Slave Trade" in *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998.

⁷² *Washington sentinel*. (Washington [D.C.]), 27 Aug. 1854. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020104/1854-08-27/ed-1/seq-3/>

made no progress except in a state of slavery.”⁷³ Anti-abolitionists defended their position in a highly racialized language. Slavery in the Ottoman Empire was abhorrent so long as it enslaved whites. *Washington Sentinel* did not touch upon the enslavement of Africans in the Ottoman Empire, it only concerned itself with Caucasian slavery. More importantly, issues of race and slavery in the Ottoman Empire found a place for themselves in the middle of the abolitionist debates in antebellum United States.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Porte’s efforts to restrict slave trade gained momentum. Writers concerned with the history and the contemporary status of the Ottoman Empire often made remarks about the reforms in question with regards to whether those reforms were successful or not. When the answer to the question of whether Ottoman reforms were successful was in the negative, the reason behind the failure of the reforms was often attributed to two factors: race and religion.

Alexander Jacob Schem, who wrote on the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 in his *The War in the East*, dealt with the subjects of the race of Ottoman Turks, modernization efforts and slavery in the Ottoman Empire. It should be noted that Schem was not a race scientist, he was a German American writer and educator. The following excerpt from *The War in the East* detailing the race of Ottoman Turks was another manifestation of how race science found a place for itself outside of scientific circles and how discussions about civilization and modernity were heavily racialized:

The ruling nationality in Turkey, the Ottoman, or Osmanli Turks, belong to the Turanian race. The only other nationality of Europe which belongs to the same race are the Hungarians, or Magyars. But while the latter have for a thousand years been identified with the other nations of Europe in religion, have constantly received large admixtures of the Aryan race, to which the remainder of Europe belongs, and have succeeded in obtaining a high degree of culture and political capacity, the Turks have during the whole period of four hundred years during which they have lived in Eastern Europe, remained foreign and hostile to the Aryan nations of Europe, and present to-day the most remarkable example of that backwardness in progress and civilization which characterizes almost the entire Turanian race. Still greater is the breach religion of the Turks

⁷³ *Washington sentinel*.

constitutes between them and the remainder of Europe. [...] The inferiority of their culture to that of the Christian nations is still more marked than the inferiority of the Turanian race to the Aryan. Thus both by race and religious affinity the Turks belong to a system of States which is constantly receding before the advance of a superior civilization, and it is only natural that public opinion in the more civilized States has accustomed itself to look upon them as a people who are not only strangers and foreigners in Europe, but who should give way to nations which in every respect are their superiors.⁷⁴

Schem was of the opinion that the reason why Ottoman Turks did not belong to the highest stratum on the hierarchy of civilizations was that they were Turanian, not Aryan, and Muslim, not Christian. Ottoman Turks had to accept the superiority of “the more civilized States” due to their inferior racial and religious identity. Schem considered religious difference to have had a greater effect than racial difference in the formation of the gulf that separates civilized Europeans from uncivilized Ottoman Turks. Nevertheless, the civilizational inferiority caused by racial difference was also stressed.

An interesting aspect of Schem’s views regarding the race of Ottoman Turks was the distinction he made between Hungarians and Turks. Schem acknowledged the “large admixtures of the Aryan race” that Hungarians received to which he attributed the obtainment of “a high degree of culture and political capacity” by Hungarians. Schem did not acknowledge similar admixtures with Aryan peoples by Ottoman Turks. In his classification, they were distinctly Turanian.

One of the biggest reasons why there occurred admixtures between Ottoman Turks and Caucasians was polygamy as practiced by the urban upper-class. Turkish members of the Ottoman upper-class were wealthy enough to purchase white slaves as domestic workers or concubines. Schem, while attributing the high degree of Hungarian culture to intermingling with the Aryan race, denounced polygamy in the Ottoman Empire as “the greatest drawback to

⁷⁴ Alexander Jacob Schem. *The War in the East: An Illustrated History of the Conflict Between Russia and Turkey with a Review of the Eastern Question* (New York: H. S. Goodspeed & Co., 1878), 101-102.

the assimilation of Turks with Europeans”.⁷⁵ He added: “Under the practice of polygamy, and more by its influence than by any other assignable cause, the Turks [...] particularly those of the wealthier classes, whose opportunities to enjoy a plurality of wives have been the best - have sunk into a kind of indolent stupor and listlessness.”⁷⁶ According to Schem, intermingling between Ottoman Turks and Caucasians which largely owed its existence to polygamy practiced by the urban upper-class had the exact opposite effect as it did in the Hungarian case.

Schem wrote on slavery in Russia and slavery in the Ottoman Empire as well. He saw the abolition of serfdom in Russia as “an event in the progress of the Empire quite as important, and destined to have as influential a bearing on the civilization of the country as the abolition of slavery in the United States”.⁷⁷ He made a direct link between a nation’s degree of civilization and the abolition of slavery. According to Schem, the importance paid by a nation to the abolition of slavery was directly proportional to that nation’s degree of civilization. In a similar vein, he saw the Ottoman resistance to abolish white slavery and polygamy as another manifestation of the supposed backwardness of Ottoman Turks. He cited Ahmet Midhat Efendi’s *The Cause of the Misfortunes*⁷⁸ as his source on the reluctance of even the progressive Young Turks to abolish white slavery. Schem saw *The Cause of the Misfortunes* as proof that Ottoman Turks were not capable of reform:

The futility of any hopes that may be entertained that the regeneration of the Turks can be accomplished through any efforts of their own, is exemplified by the narrow-minded views and the bigoted partisanship of this work, which, written by one of the most active members of the party of reform to ascertain and define the causes of the evils with which the Empire is afflicted, might be expected to embody their most advanced views respecting the future of their nation. [...] It lauds polygamy as the most glorious privilege of Islam, and while it condemns the trade in negro slaves, it upholds the traffic in white girls for Moslem harems as one of the precious treasures and a palladium of the Empire. If this is the best programme that the men of new ideas have to propose for their country, how little have we to expect from those who still avow their attachment to

⁷⁵ Schem, 103.

⁷⁶ Schem, 104.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁸ Schem’s translation.

all the old ways.⁷⁹

Schem's views regarding the Ottoman attitude towards white slavery and polygamy reflected the general trend to gauge the readiness of Ottoman Turks to become more civilized by the West. Schem credited the perceived persistence of Ottoman Turks to cling to the institutions of white slavery and polygamy as the reason behind their backwardness. As long as Ottoman Turks continued to uphold white slavery and polygamy, they could not be categorized as civilized and progressed. Compared to Russians and Hungarians, Ottoman Turks lagged behind in a high degree of culture and civilization due to the persistent existence of white slavery despite the reforms implemented by the Porte.

Themes of race, civilization and slavery appeared in texts by other authors writing on the Ottoman Empire. English historian Charles Augustus Freeman, in his book *The Ottoman Power in Europe*, made remarks about the institutions of slavery and polygamy in the Ottoman Empire as well as "The Races of Eastern Europe". He was of the opinion "that distinctions of race and creed are far more lasting in Eastern Europe than they are in Western".⁸⁰ He exemplified his opinion by giving the example of "the great case, the case where there is the widest difference of all, is of course the difference between the Turk and his Christian subjects".⁸¹ He added that the "wide gap between race and race, between creed and creed" took "its strongest and most repulsive form in the case of the Turk".⁸²

Freeman's writings on the race of Ottoman Turks bore witness to the infiltration of the race science rhetoric into popular discourse. He discussed the race of Ottoman Turks with relevance to the question of why they were different from other nations in Europe. Freeman's answer to the aforementioned question was as follows:

The reason is because the Turk has no share in any of those things which,

⁷⁹ Schem, 564.

⁸⁰ Edward Augustus Freeman, *The Ottoman Power in Europe: Its Nature, Its Growth, and Its Decline* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1877), 27.

⁸¹ Freeman, 27.

⁸² Ibid.

among all differences, are shared in common by the European nations. The Turk belongs to another branch of the human family from the nations of Europe. He has no share in the common history of these nations, of their common memories, their common feelings, their common civilization. Lastly, what is more important than all the rest, he does not profess any of the forms of the Christian religion, but follows the religion of Mahomet.⁸³

Freeman, like Schem, attributed the perceived difference of Ottoman Turks in culture to their different race and religion. He excluded Ottoman Turks from the branch of the human family to which European nations belonged, therefore excluded them from the “common civilization” that they shared as well. Like Schem, Freeman acknowledged the racial impurity of Ottoman Turks but did not go on to claim that this racial intermingling with European nations caused any change in the level of culture or civilization:

(...) the Turk has no share in that original kindred of race and language which binds together all the European nations. The original Turks did not belong to the Aryan branch of mankind, and their original speech is not an Aryan speech. The Turks and their speech belong to altogether another class of nations and languages. They were wholly distinct alike from the Aryan inhabitants of Europe and from the inhabitants of Western Asia, who, wherever they were not Aryan, mainly belonged to the Semitic family. (...) It is true that the original Turkish blood must have been greatly modified, as their language has been greatly modified, by their passage through Persia and Asia Minor. It must also have been greatly modified by their being joined by many European renegades, and by their custom of forcing the youth of the nations whom they conquered to serve in their armies and to embrace their religion. In this way we might say that the Turks in Europe are an artificial nation, and it is certain that many of them must be, in actual descent, of European blood. But the original stock was something altogether foreign to Europe, and, in a case like this, it is the original stock which gives the character to the whole.⁸⁴

Freeman’s attitude towards the race of Ottoman Turks paralleled that of Schem greatly. Freeman went on to claim that the failure of Ottoman Turks to integrate culturally with the nations of Europe could not be attributed solely to their “Turanian” origin. He gave the example of Bulgars and Hungarians as nations of Turanian origin who have successfully

⁸³ Freeman, 41.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

integrated into European culture.⁸⁵ He then asked: “We have seen that it is not impossible for Turanians settled in Europe to become more or less European (...) But while other Turanian nations have done this, the Turks have never done it. Why is this? Why could not the Turks do as the Bulgarians did or the Magyars did?”⁸⁶ Freeman found an answer to this question in the difference of religion between European nations and Ottoman Turks: “The reason is because the Bulgarians and the Magyars embraced the common religion of Europe, while the Turks have never embraced it.”⁸⁷ In this sense, it could be argued that Freeman did not hold an altogether racially deterministic view. What follows from his arguments is that had Ottoman Turks become Christian, they would have had the chance to reach that high level of civilization enjoyed by European nations.

Freeman also touched upon the subjects of polygamy and domestic slavery in the Ottoman Empire. He claimed that the existence of the institutions of polygamy and domestic slavery were the very essence of what made a nation Eastern, as opposed to Western:

Take for instance the two great features which distinguish Eastern from Western society, features which are closely connected with one another, and of which it may be safely said that one at least implies the other. Eastern society not only allows slavery and polygamy, but it is grounded upon them. An Eastern nation from which slavery and polygamy were wholly swept away would cease to be an Eastern nation. It would, whatever its geographical position, have, in the most important social respects, become Western.⁸⁸

According to Freeman, domestic slavery and polygamy were two critical institutions in the Ottoman Empire that impeded the Porte’s efforts to become modernized and Westernized. He made it clear that the path to becoming Western and therefore more civilized passed through the abolition of domestic slavery and polygamy. Abolition, in this sense, gave a nation *carte blanche* to join in the ranks of civilized Western nations. Freeman made the same argument in his book *The Eastern Question in Its Historical Bearings*:

⁸⁵ Ibid., 43-49.

⁸⁶ Freeman, 54.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

As long as any people remains Mahometan, it cannot do without these institutions, institutions which we hold to be destructive of all social happiness and progress, polygamy and slavery. Therefore Turkish rule cannot be reformed. You may have *hatti-humayouns* and firmans; you may draw, as an Englishman in the pay of the Turk bids us draw, a beautiful picture of his Imperial Majesty the Sultan, anxious for the welfare of all his subjects, labouring night and day to make reforms for their good. Will those reforms ever come?⁸⁹

Again, the lack of reforms for the abolition of slavery and polygamy were interpreted as evidence for the biggest impediment to Ottoman Turks' claim to civilization by Freeman. He saw Ottoman reforms as unsatisfactory and insufficient. The very institutions, slavery and polygamy, which race scientists credited with contributing to the change in the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks, were now denounced as being impediments to the modernization efforts of the Ottoman Empire.

Schem and Freeman denied that intermingling between Ottoman Turks and members of the Aryan (or Caucasian) race resulted in a remarkable enough change in Ottoman Turkish culture. Irish abolitionist Richard Robert Madden made arguments that ran somewhat counter to those of Schem and Freeman in his book *The Turkish Empire: In Its Relations with Christianity and Civilization*. In Chapter V of the book, Madden discussed the racial origins and history of Ottoman Turks:

The Turks (a race altogether differing from the Saracens) derive their origin from the roving barbarians of the mountains of Tartary. (...) Whatever improvement has taken place in the Turkish character and external conformation, may be attributed, in the first instance, to the habit they contracted during their first occupation of Sogdiana, for the period of ninety years, of intermarrying with races more polished than their own. In later times, the practice that prevails, at least among the grandees of the Turkish empire, of marrying Georgian and Circassian slaves, has no doubt tended to soften down their Tartar characteristics.⁹⁰

Madden's writing was also influenced heavily by nineteenth-century race science. He acknowledged the Asian origins of Ottoman Turks and credited the practice of domestic

⁸⁹ Edward Augustus Freeman, *The Eastern Question in Its Historical Bearings* (Manchester: National Reform Union, 1876), 14.

⁹⁰ Richard Robert Madden, *The Turkish Empire: In Its Relations with Christianity and Civilization* (London: T. C. Newby, 1862), 210-211.

slavery and polygamy with the physical and cultural improvement of Turks. Was this improvement sufficient for Ottoman reforms of the nineteenth century to be successful? Madden did not believe so: “Lord Palmerston believes in the regeneration of Turkey. I confess I have no belief in the probability of any such renovation or renewal of vigor or vital power in that Empire.”⁹¹ Although the “Tartar characteristics” of Ottoman Turks were softened down through their custom of “marrying Georgian and Circassian slaves”, this improvement failed to make Ottoman Turks civilized enough to be considered among other European nations.

Similar racialized denouncements of practices related to Caucasian slave trade in the Ottoman Empire came from *The Methodist Review* as well. *The Methodist Review* made a case for the intensification of missionary activity in the Ottoman Empire on the grounds that Ottoman Turks were racially degenerate. *The Methodist Review* also charged at the “sensual” characteristic that Ottoman Turks already had which was taken to its extreme by Caucasian slave trade and their religion. Taken in that regard, *The Methodist Review* saw Caucasian slave trade as mainly a sexual practice that contributed greatly to a racial degeneration: “It must be confessed that the Turks are a sensual people, and that their sensuality takes the form, mainly, of licentiousness. We do not refer to the practice of polygamy, for we are convinced that polygamy is much less common among them than is generally supposed. We refer to the degrading illicit intercourse which has generally been described as a crime against nature.”⁹² What *The Methodist Review* denounced as “a crime against nature” was slavery. The catastrophic consequences in the racial identity of Ottoman Turks caused by slave trade were elaborated upon:

No one of the Mohammedan races has carried out the license given to sensual passion by the Koran and the adhering tradition to such an extent as have the Ottoman Turks, and no race has suffered so much from that license. The evil consequences are far-reaching and baleful in the extreme. It is to feed Turkish sensuality that the slave-trade throughout the empire and in the interior of Africa is maintained. The beautiful, fair daughters who are purchased from the Georgians

⁹¹ Madden, 16.

⁹² *The Methodist Review* 64 (1882), 547-553, pp. 548.

and Circassians also find their way at last to the harems of Constantinople, Brusa, Smyrna, Adrianople, Aleppo, Bagdad and other towns and cities of Asia Minor. One of the direct results of this sensuality is that the Turks have degenerated physically during the past two hundred years. That the conquerors of Constantinople were a hardy race of great physical strength there can be no doubt; that the great majority of modern Turks are of an effeminate type is equally certain; very many of them are persons of fine appearance, but they are physically weak, without elasticity, giving the impression of men who have lost their vitality.⁹³

Although *The Methodist Review* credited Ottoman Turks for having a “fine appearance”, it also highlighted the emasculating effect caused by Caucasian slave trade. *The Methodist Review* heavily relied on already established Orientalist tropes of the degenerate, effeminate Orient.⁹⁴ Its men were weak and its institutions perpetuated the degeneracy that was shunned by the West.

The Methodist Review went on to describe Ottoman Turkish women and the mental capabilities of Ottoman Turks:

The same may be said even more emphatically of Turkish women; they are small in stature, of a sickly complexion, easily fatigued by slight exertion, and become prematurely old. After the age of forty all feminine beauty is gone; the eyes have become sunken, the cheeks hollow, the face wrinkled; and there remains no trace of the activity and physical strength often seen in English women of sixty-five, or even of seventy, years of age. Another immediate result of the prevailing sensuality is the mental imbecility of multitudes of Ottoman Turks; great numbers among them are intellectually stupid. Many, even of the young men, have the vacant look which borders close on the idiotic state. Severe mental application is for them almost a physical impossibility.⁹⁵

The loss of vitality by Ottoman men was also attributed to Ottoman women. Moreover, the mental capabilities of Ottoman Turks were greatly underestimated. *The Methodist Review* saw the Ottoman institution of slavery as the cause behind so great a racial degeneration. The article then proceeded to claim that Ottoman Turks could only be saved from their effeminate

⁹³ *The Methodist Review*, 549.

⁹⁴ Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 242.

⁹⁵ *The Methodist Review*, 550.

and degenerate state through Christian proselytism and the abolition of slavery.⁹⁶ Once again, the paradoxical effect of Caucasian slave trade on the racial identity of Ottoman Turks was made clear. Although Caucasian slave trade gave Ottoman Turks a “fine appearance”, it caused a moral, mental and racial decay as well. This decay could only be reversed through the efforts of Christian missionaries. In short, the racialized critique of Caucasian slave trade and slavery in the Ottoman Empire were used as excuses to promote Christian proselytism. Ottoman Turks were made racially incapable of reform due to slavery and they required extrareligious assistance.

Nevertheless, the West did not uniformly dismiss the Ottoman efforts to modernize as futile altogether. Especially before the abolition of slavery in the United States, the Porte’s restrictive measures towards slavery were applauded as signs of progress in the Ottoman Empire. Plaudits heaped upon the Porte for its restrictive measures against slavery before the abolition of slavery in the United States highlighted the irony of a supposedly less civilized nation taking bigger steps than a more civilized nation like the United States. In *The London Review and Weekly Journal of Politics, Literature, Art, & Society* published during the American Civil War in 1862, the aforementioned irony was brought to readers’ attention in the following words:

[Keçecizâde Fuad Paşa was] bringing Turkey nearer to the pale of Western civilization, the better qualifying her to enter into the comity of nations, by carrying out the religious reformation which was initiated some time back. Under these circumstances, although the American question [Civil War] may absorb public interest just now, it is difficult, and would certainly be unwise, to remain wholly indifferent to the process going on in Turkey, which, according to some, is one of disintegration, and to others one of regeneration. To Englishmen nothing could be more satisfactory, after the sacrifices of blood and treasure they have made, than to discover grounds for believing that the Ottoman empire is slowly but surely emerging from barbarism and fanaticism; and there will be something strange and startling in the contrast, painful as it may be to our pride of race, presented by the rise of the Turks in the scale of civilization, while the free and enlightened citizens of the great Republic are setting at defiance the principles of international law, are trying to establish a prohibitory tariff that will seclude them from intercourse with other nations, and are relapsing into

⁹⁶ Ibid.

the inhuman practices of medieval warfare. Assuredly it will be a strange and humiliating circumstance that while the descendants of Englishmen are fighting on one side for slavery and on the other side for protection, the sons of Othman should be engaged in the abolition of slavery (...)⁹⁷

The London Review saw Ottoman reforms and the American Civil War through a perspective influenced by the popularization of race science rhetoric in the nineteenth century. It contrasted “descendants of Englishmen” with the “sons of Othman”. The progressive reforms implemented to eradicate slavery by the latter whereas the former still lagged behind was seen as “painful” to the “pride of race” of the English. In this sense, more civilized nations like the United States had the right of way where implementing reforms was concerned. They were not expected to be preceded by other supposedly less civilized nations like the Ottoman Empire.

The implementation of reforms by the Porte to suppress the slave trade within the imperial borders was also seen as the result of European influence as opposed to Ottoman initiative.⁹⁸ American phrenologist Samuel Roberts Wells was optimistic about the suppression of Caucasian slave trade:

It is quite probable that ere long the traffic carried on by Turkish merchants in Circassian slaves will be entirely suppressed. The political relations between Turkey and the other powers of Europe have become so intimate, that many social innovations of an anti-slavery character have been gradually introduced, and it may be confidently expected that at least that most revolting feature of Turkish slavery, females for the harem, will be soon discountenanced.⁹⁹

Wells credited “powers of Europe” with introducing “many social innovations of an anti-slavery character” which necessitated the continuance of European influence on the Porte for the suppression of Caucasian slave trade. Abolitionism came from the West and it was a sign of a higher civilizational level.

In a similar vein, Polish-American author Adam Gurowski also credited outside

⁹⁷ “Reform in Turkey,” *The London Review and Weekly Journal of Politics, Literature, Art, & Society*, 4 (1862), 119-120, pp. 119.

⁹⁸ Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition*.

⁹⁹ Samuel Roberts Wells, *The Illustrated Annuals of Phrenology and Physiognomy: For the Years 1865-6-7-8-9-70-1-2 & 3. Complete in One Volume, of Over 500 Pages* (New York: S. R. Wells, 1873), 11.

influence on Ottoman domestic affairs as the reason behind the reforms implemented by the Porte in the nineteenth century:

Whatever has been the result of the superficial and momentaneous success, obtained by reform, it has not been by any real effort or progress of the Turks themselves, but either by the Slavi, the Greeks, the Armenians, or by the direct exertion of French, English, Belgian or German settlers. Conscientious foreigners, lured to Constantinople and Turkey, tell all the same tale of disappointment and wasted exertions. If something, very insignificant even, has been done to improve the material condition of Turkey, no such effect has been produced on the Turks themselves.¹⁰⁰

Gurowski was considerably more skeptical than Wells with relation to the success of the reforms which were implemented as a result of the efforts made by “conscientious foreigners”. Nevertheless, Gurowski made it clear that Ottoman Turks were incapable of implementing even unsuccessful reforms on their own as these reforms in question had to be imported from the lands of the Caucasian race.

2.4. Conclusion

The West considered Caucasian slave trade to be a double edged sword where the racial identity of Ottoman Turks was concerned. Raciologists and the public observed the disappearance of Asiatic features from the physical appearance of Ottoman Turks and found the reason behind this phenomenon in the intermingling between Ottoman Turks and white slaves. On the other hand, the two institutions which perpetuated and made this cosmetic alteration possible, slavery and polygamy, were seen as having had a negative racial effect. A. H. Guernsey, writing for *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, summarized the generally accepted views about the race of Ottoman Turks in the nineteenth century: “This constant influx of new blood has wrought an entire change in the physical characteristics of the Turks. The ugly Tartars have grown into one of the handsomest races on the globe, in which the proportion of the original Tartar blood is very small. But no admixture of blood has wrought any change in

¹⁰⁰ Adam Gurowski, *The Turkish Question* (New York: William Taylor & Co., 1854), 11.

their moral or intellectual nature.”¹⁰¹

The racialization of the influence of slavery and polygamy in the Ottoman Empire coincided with the Ottoman efforts to modernize and the Western pressure to restrict slave trade. The Porte’s modernization efforts themselves became a reference point in discussions about whether Ottoman Turks could be classified as truly civilized and therefore not only physically but culturally Caucasian. The existence of slavery and polygamy in Ottoman society and the slowness of the Porte to respond to the Western abolitionist pressure were generally held to be the proof that Ottoman Turks were not Caucasian on a cultural and civilizational level.

The physical Caucasiannes and the cultural lack thereof substantiated the ambiguity surrounding the racial identity of Ottoman Turks. Their status as a heterogenous race was generally accepted. Western raciologists and writers from different fields dealt with the subject of racial heterogeneity in the Ottoman Empire. These writings often reflected Western anxieties about racial intermingling in their own societies, especially after the Civil War in the United States.

¹⁰¹ A. H. Guernsey, "English Interests in the Eastern Question - Her Indian Possessions," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 3/2 (1877), 129-43, pp. 138.

CHAPTER III: “HYBRID OSMANLEES”¹⁰²: RACIAL IMPURITY AND OTTOMAN TURKS

Kıbrıslı Osman Bey (or Frederick Millingen) described the capital of the Ottoman Empire in the following words:

Few are the places on the face of the earth which can exhibit a greater variety of specimens of the human race than Stambul, the capital of the Sultan. From the white Caucassian to the black Negro, all the intervening tints and complexions are to be seen within the precincts of this metropolis, which, now-a-days, is what Babel must have been at the time of its famous tower.¹⁰³

Osman Bey painted the picture of a cosmopolitan imperial capital where one could find the greatest racial diversity. The binary of the black and white coexisted with “all the intervening tints and complexions” which Osman Bey added to indicate that there existed racial intermingling and as such, racial impurity in the Ottoman Empire. As race science of the nineteenth century shifted from a monogenistic view towards the races of the world to a polygenistic view, the concept of racial impurity came to be regarded as a possible but an undesired occurrence whereas racial purity became closely associated with “strength, survival and victory over other races”.¹⁰⁴ Race science, with its proponents such as Morton, Nott, Gliddon and Gobineau in particular, saw racial impurity as a degenerative factor.¹⁰⁵ Nott and Gliddon established the racially altered and therefore impure identity of Ottoman Turks: “That the present *Caucasianized* Osmanlee is not the same animal now that his forefathers were in the 12th century, is easily proved.”¹⁰⁶ Since the racial identity of Ottoman Turks was a topic upon which there was hardly any agreement due to a generally accepted conviction that Ottoman

¹⁰² Nott and Gliddon, 568.

¹⁰³ Frederick Millingen, *Slavery in Turkey. The Sultan's Harem. A paper read before the Anthropological Society of London* (London: Stanford, Charing Cross, 1870), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 54.

¹⁰⁶ Nott and Gliddon, 568.

Turks were racially a heterogeneous group of people, the supposed undesirability of and stigma around racial impurity added another dimension to the scientific and popular discussions about the race of Ottoman Turks in the West. The stigma around racial impurity was especially prominent in the postbellum United States where miscegenation was heavily debated. The question of the race of Ottoman Turks made an appearance in these aforementioned debates.

In the 40th Congress in 1867, James Brooks, the Democratic representative of New York gave a speech warning the House of the dangers of miscegenation by presenting Ottoman Turks as an example:

But alas! they entered upon the same degraded crime of amalgamation and miscegenation, and they soon emasculated these once heroic Turks, the approach of whose crescent had made the Christian tremble in every court of Europe, and upon every navigable internal sea. In their harems the thick-lipped, woolly-headed woman was mixed up with the beautiful Circassian and Georgian, and children of all hues and colors and races were the product of this hateful miscegenation; and God-even the God of Mohammed- has punished the Moslem by his own degradation and his overthrow for violating that first law of nature - the preservation for the purity of race. [...] I myself have seen in Constantinople around a mosque where the sultan was at prayer some thirty or forty beautiful Circassians and Georgians of his harem kissing the hand of a eunuch, an Ethiopian, a negro selected from the interior of Africa as the custodian of these women, and who thus had become their master. The moment the Turk thus associated himself with the negro or negress and recognized him or her either as brother or sister, from that hour the Turkish empire began to crumble until it now exists only by the toleration of the Christian Powers of Europe.¹⁰⁷

James Brooks was a politician addressing and criticizing the government in the highest legislative body of his country. His speech was dotted with many factual inaccuracies and logical discrepancies. The occupational identity of Brooks and the specifics of the logistics of his speech may be the reason why Brooks prioritized agitation over accuracy. For example, Brooks did not elucidate how the presence of both black women and Caucasian women in the harem resulted in “hateful miscegenation”. Nor did he attribute the reason behind the “hateful miscegenation” to another social and cultural practice in the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, his

¹⁰⁷ *Congressional Globe of the Second Session Fortieth Congress* (City of Washington: F. and J. Rives & George A. Bailey, 1854), 72.

speech shed light on the American attitudes towards racial impurity in the Ottoman Empire and perhaps more so, in the United States. Brooks condemned “hateful miscegenation” as both a natural and a religious sin that would lead to political decay. He drew on the Circassian beauty trope and evoked the image of the racially pure, white Circassian and Georgian girl being subjugated to the black *kızlar ağası*. The white girl, by virtue of being a member of the superior Caucasian race, could not associate with or be in an inferior position to any black person. If this happened, the result was a cataclysmic political and social dissolution, as exemplified by the case of the Ottoman Empire. In Brooks’ speech, “hybrid Osmanlees” and their situation highlighted the anxieties caused by the question of racial intermingling in postbellum America.

The origins of the word “miscegenation” itself was directly related to the racial tensions in 1860’s in the United States. The word was invented during the Civil War in 1864 in an anonymous pamphlet titled *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races Applied to the American White Man and Negro*.¹⁰⁸ The pamphlet caused an uproar in both political and pseudoscientific discussions. It was eventually discovered to be a hoax aimed at Lincoln.¹⁰⁹ This pamphlet, which coined the term “miscegenation” and made it one of the most heavily debated topics for a considerable period of time in the United States, also made mention of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks and their hybridity: “The Turks have also been much improved in appearance by their intermarriage with the women of Circassia and Georgia, but the system of polygamy has enfeebled the males so that they are, to some extent, a degenerate race.”¹¹⁰ The pamphlet *Miscegenation* proposed that a possible racial intermingling in the United States would be altogether beneficial. In that regard, it is quite interesting that the pamphlet called the race of Ottoman Turks, a product of miscegenation, a “degenerate race”. What the pamphlet sought to establish was that the degeneracy in the race of Ottoman Turks was not caused by the American-invented concept of miscegenation but by the wholly Oriental

¹⁰⁸ Young, 135.

¹⁰⁹ Elise Lemire, *“Miscegenation”: Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 174.

¹¹⁰ Lemire, 13.

practice of polygamy. Brooks, on the other hand, Ottomanized miscegenation for his argument's sake.

Shortly after the publication of *Miscegenation*, Robert Dale Owen who was a member of the House of Representatives published *The Wrong of Slavery, the Right of Emancipation, and the Future of the African Race in the United States*.¹¹¹ Owen was of the opinion that the offspring of miscegenation (or the “amalgamation” of races as he called it) was inferior to the pure races.¹¹² However, Owen admitted that there were some cases, with that of the Ottoman Turks among them, which disproved his claim that the offspring of “amalgamation” would be inferior to pure races: “It would appear that there are certain races of men the cross between which produces a race quite equal to either of the progenitors. This is said to be true of the Turk and the African. It may be that the Anglo-Saxon and the African, extreme varieties, are less suited to each other, and that the mixed race degenerates.”¹¹³ Again, the question of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks appeared in the heart of a political debate which dominated American society. Owen placed Ottoman Turks below Anglo-Saxons and closer to “Africans” on the racial hierarchy and pointed that the success of racial “amalgamation” in the Ottoman Empire would not be able to be repeated in the United States based on racial differences.

3.1. Pears or Quinces?

In such a racially diverse atmosphere as the Ottoman society in which miscegenation or racial “amalgamation” were daily occurrences as perceived by the West, the question of how the matters of integration and racial hierarchy within Ottoman society were handled naturally arose. How an Ottoman citizen's racial identity complexified their supranational identity and how the racially diverse Ottoman society differentiated between its various racial components were matters of interest. As the Ottoman Empire strove to forge a supranational “Osmanlı”

¹¹¹ Young, 138.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Robert Dale Owen, *The Wrong of Slavery, the Right of Emancipation, and the Future of the African Race in the United States* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1864), 218.

identity that would embrace the entirety of the racial, ethnic and religious differences in Ottoman society, the Western observations about the racial identity of Ottoman Turks came to recognize their “Osmanlı” identity as well.

Guernsey, writing for *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly*, used the metaphor of pears and quinces to convey the image of a society which successfully managed to integrate the offspring of racial miscegenation: “Mahmoud II, was half French, and we know not how much Circassian, in blood; but he was as thorough an Osmanli as was Osman himself. Graft a pear-slip upon a quince stock, and the fruit will be pears. Graft Circassian upon Turkish stock, and it will be, not a Circassian or a hybrid, but a pure Turk.”¹¹⁴

Guernsey was not alone in making the claim that the progeny of miscegenation would not be hybrids but “pure” Ottoman Turks. *The British Quarterly Review* echoed similar views with regards to the hybrid-or-Turk dilemma:

The Ottoman Turks, as we have just seen, are physically a very mixed race. We may say for certain that, among the ruling classes in the great days of their empire, the prevailing blood was not Turkish. But they are practically Turks all the same. They neither assimilated the conquered nations, nor were assimilated by them: they simply admitted vast numbers of recruits, one by one, into their own ranks. [...] For all historical purposes the Ottoman Turk is a Turk, no less than Ghazaveid or Seljuk.¹¹⁵

Although the quoted section admitted that Ottoman Turks were “physically a very mixed race”, it nevertheless did not treat Ottoman Turks as a hybrid group of people. The alteration which occurred in Ottoman Turks was once again only admitted to be a physical type of change, as discussed in the previous chapter.

British folklorists John S. Stuart-Glennie and Lucy Garnett observed the same integration and assimilation trend among the offspring of Circassian slaves:

Circassians who have passed through the slavery stage are said to evince a certain amount of racial sympathy for each other, and also to be very charitable to those who have been less fortunate than

¹¹⁴ Guernsey, 138.

¹¹⁵ “The Turks in Europe”, *The British Quarterly Review*, 64 (1876), 441-471, pp. 215.

themselves. The discovery that an acquaintance is also of slave origin forms immediately a bond of union between two women, though, as no odium attaches to such an extraction, and all trace of it is lost in the next generation, this race feeling is not perpetuated in their offspring, who are, of course, Osmanlis.¹¹⁶

Stuart-Glennie and Garnett found the “racial sympathy” that Circassians felt for each other to not be inherited by their offspring on the grounds that the progeny of the victims of the Circassian slave trade did not consider themselves to be racially distinct from Ottoman Turks.

How did the “pure Turk” rule over a racially diverse society? The pseudoscientific racist circles used the treatment of different races in the Ottoman Empire as an example to support their arguments about the superiority of the Caucasian race:

(...) the Greek or Circassian slave of a Turkish emir is a very different being from the woolly haired and thick-lipped Ethiopian, who occupies a yet lower servile position in the same household. Though equally slaves, as being bought with a price, they are yet inherently and essentially wide as the poles asunder, as their rude and ignorant but nevertheless practical master clearly perceives.¹¹⁷

The Anthropological Review presented the Ottoman household as the microcosm of Ottoman society. Although the patriarch of the household was “rude and ignorant”, he was “practical” enough to appreciate the racial differences between his white slave and his black slave. The difference of treatment of the slaves of the household based on racial differences was lauded.

The ability or lack thereof of the Ottoman state in ruling over a racially diverse population was discussed in the West as well. The ability to rule was attributed to a racial characteristic possessed by Ottoman Turks which granted them with a talent in governance in Charles Loring Brace’s *The Races of the Old World*: “This race shows the wonderful power of *governing*, which once characterized it, by the small proportion which still, both in Europe and Africa, form the ruling class over vast multitudes. In European Turkey their number is only estimated to be from 700,000 to 1,000,000, though holding in check a population of about

¹¹⁶ Lucy Mary Jane Garnett, John S. Stuart-Glennie. *The Women of Turkey and Their Folklore* (London: David Nutt, 1891), 414.

¹¹⁷ "Race in Legislation and Political Economy," *The Anthropological Review*, 4/13 (1866), 113-135, at p. 125

10,000,000.”¹¹⁸ Although Ottoman Turks were a minority in “European Turkey”, they nevertheless were considered to possess a racial disposition to governing a racially and ethnically diverse empire in Brace’s treatment of the “races of the old world”.

Although the efforts to forge a supranational identity based on Ottomannes did not go unnoticed by the West, the conundrum of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks nevertheless remained as puzzling as ever. The emerging supranational identity around Ottomannes did not eradicate the racial impurity of Ottoman Turks. As the quotes above demonstrate, Ottoman Turks were considered to be “pure Turks” *despite* their already established and unquestionable racial impurity. The emphasis on the Turkishness of Ottoman Turks strengthened the Western perspective which did not regard Ottoman Turks as Caucasian. Whether “hybrid Osmanlees” or “pure Turks”, they were distinct and different from members of the Caucasian race.

3.2. “Neither Asiatics nor Europeans”¹¹⁹: Cultural Hybridity

As Şükrü Hanioglu states: “The Tanzimat era of reform marks a watershed in Ottoman intellectual and cultural life.”¹²⁰ There was a “growing fascination”¹²¹ with Western culture amongst members of the Tanzimat bureaucracy which lasted well into the Hamidian period. The increased intellectual, educational and cultural contact between the West and the Ottoman Empire introduced a newly emerging member of the Ottoman society to the West: the culturally hybrid Ottoman Turk on the path to modernization and Westernization. Coupled with the reforms of the Tanzimat and Hamidian periods, the West began to regard Ottoman Turks as not only racially but also culturally hybrid as well. The prevalence of the notion of the cultural hybridity of the Ottoman Turk neared its zenith towards the end of the Hamidian period and peaked in the Second Constitutional era.

¹¹⁸ Charles Loring Brace, *The Races of the Old World: A Manual of Ethnology* (London: C. Scribner, 1863), 251.

¹¹⁹ Gurowski, 8.

¹²⁰ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 94.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

The Independent magazine encapsulated the Western perception of the cultural hybridity of Ottoman Turks, or the Young Turk, in 1909:

It must be remembered that the Young Turk is a distinctly modern product, and represents the resultant of the same general conditions that have produced the American. On to the fundamental Tartar stock, brave, self-reliant, simple in life, rather narrow in vision, peaceful, if let alone, but intolerant of opposition, have been grafted many of the characteristics of the Aryan races. The harem, with its representatives of other peoples of varying intellectual, moral and religious types, has been a more important element than many realize. Partly as a result of this infusion of new blood, partly as the natural consequence of modern intercommunication, the child of the heterogeneous harem became a cosmopolitan. For a time this was scarcely to his advantage. He appeared to be more or less of a hybrid, neither Turk nor European, neither Moslem nor Christian, and was scouted by all. Little by little he has emerged until he appears today as an upholder of constitutional law, a believer in religious freedom, an up-to-date man of the world.¹²²

The Independent regarded the “Young Turk” as “an up-to-date man of the world” because of the restoration of constitutional law in the Ottoman Empire. The magazine also partly credited racial intermingling due to white slavery with producing “a cosmopolitan”. Nevertheless, this racial hybridity was dismissed on the grounds that it led to hybridity which was disadvantageous for Ottoman Turks. *The Independent* only regarded the reformation of constitutional law as a salient reason for the admittance of Ottoman Turks into the ranks of the rest of the modern races of the world. In short, racial hybridity was not an advantageous trait in and of itself, it had to be combined with cultural and political amalgamation as well. The Ottoman Turk was doomed to remain a “hybrid” unless he strove to culturally and politically reform himself.

3.3. Conclusion

The racially mixed identity of Ottoman Turks came to be established in the West due to the

¹²² *The Independent*, (New York: The Independent, 1909), 491.

proliferation of writings focusing on Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire. Racial hybridity was a topic of heated discussion in the West, especially in the United States in the nineteenth century. In that case, it was near inevitable that the topic of racial impurity of Ottoman Turks would find a place for itself in these racialized discussions. The case of the mixed racial identity of Ottoman Turks was often cited as an example either to be avoided or followed in arguments either in favor of or against miscegenation in the United States. Moreover, the racial impurity of Ottoman Turks further complexified the Western perception of the race of Ottoman Turks. Did the children of miscegenation inherit the racial identities of their parents? If racial intermingling was commonplace in the Ottoman Empire, how did the Porte manage to rule over such a racially diverse society? The answers to both questions came from different camps which reflected the West's own anxieties about racial intermingling and threats to the racial hierarchy.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

American suffragette Ellen Batelle Dietrick, writing for *The Popular Science Monthly* in 1894, remarked on white slavery in the Ottoman Empire in the following words: “Most miserable to-day is the lot of that people born of a race of slave mothers; most significantly is that debilitated empire known as ‘the Sick Man of Europe’.”¹²³ That Ottoman slaveholders and descendants of white slavery were almost Biblically cursed was a relatively new invention towards the end of the second half of the nineteenth century when abolitionist zeal peaked. Once credited as a racially “Caucasianizing” factor, white slavery in the Ottoman Empire became a dart board to which the arrows of criticism came from many directions. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, white slavery in the Ottoman Empire was generally held to be a racially and culturally corrupting, degenerative factor.

Yet it was not always so. Much had been written about Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire and the racial identity of Ottoman Turks before the end of the nineteenth century. Initially, slavery in the Ottoman Empire evoked the image of the young white Circassian damsel in distress, who, mainly by virtue of her physical excellence, gave the name “Caucasian” to the white race in the eighteenth century. Blumenbach, the father of “race”, was certain that Ottoman Turks were Caucasian, due to their status as a “people born of a race of slave mothers”. Unlike Dietrick, Blumenbach did not comment on the culturally degenerative effect of the selfsame Caucasian slavery which he credited with giving Ottoman Turks a white appearance.

What changed between Blumenbach and Dietrick was the evolution of race science itself and the political developments and trends in the nineteenth century which shook how the

¹²³ Ellen Batelle Dietrick, “The Circassian Slave in Turkish Harems”, *The Popular Science Monthly* 44, (1894), 481-486. pp. 485.

West regarded slavery and race to the core. Race science evolved to be more rigid in its categorizations and more politicized as it implicitly assigned superior or inferior status to the peoples of the world. The term “Caucasian” included not only the inhabitants of the Caucasus but also those who were deemed civilized enough to be included as members of the superior white race. Racist thought grew more scientific in the nineteenth century with the advent of new fields like craniology and phrenology which were used to differentiate between races. Raciologists invented more and more racial categories, but the superiority of the Caucasian race remained unchallenged. Racist thinking gained a footing in popular discourse as well. Terms invented by race scientists were often used in travel writing, literature, magazines, pamphlets and newspapers. Viewing the world through the lens of race science was disseminated to numerous areas.

Race science in the nineteenth century laid the foundation of a racial hierarchy whose highest stratum consisted of the Caucasian race. Consequently, who exactly belonged at the top of the hierarchy of races was one of the most heavily debated topics in racist discussions. Who was the Ottoman Turk who enslaved the white Caucasian? Were he and his progeny white as well? The West, although with slight disagreements, generally saw eye to eye where the Caucasianized physical appearance of Ottoman Turks was concerned. Ottoman Turks were accepted to be physically distinct from their historical Asiatic ancestors with their Caucasian-like physical and anatomical characteristics as a result of their intermingling with white slaves. Yet the West still repudiated the place of Ottoman Turks within the Caucasian race. After all, Ottoman Turks came to possess a Caucasian-like physical appearance due to their continued practice of white slavery. With the rise of the abolitionist movement, the West began to regard Caucasian slavery in the Ottoman Empire as the proof of the uncivilizedness and racial inferiority of Ottoman Turks.

The equivocal nature of the racial identity of Ottoman Turks solidified the Western certainty of one characteristic that the Turkish speaking Muslim subjects of the Ottoman

Empire possessed: racial impurity. The West referred to Ottoman Turks as a racially hybrid, heterogeneous, mixed society. While discussing the racial impurity of Ottoman Turks, the West revealed its own anxieties surrounding the issues of miscegenation, ruling over racially diverse societies and maintaining the racial order. Although the question of who the Ottoman Turk was racially was never one over which a definite consensus was reached, the endurance of this question throughout nineteenth century shed light on the West's changing attitudes towards the themes of race, slavery, abolition and reform. When the West spoke about Ottoman Turks, it also implicitly spoke about itself.

Ottoman intellectuals who were aware of the discussions about the race of Ottoman Turks and how it was impacted by the institution of Caucasian slavery often took on a defensive stance such as Halil Halid. They believed that it was incorrect that Ottoman Turks should be classified as non-Caucasian racial hybrids. Murat Ergin's "*Is the Turk a White Man?*" and Zafer Toprak's *Cumhuriyet ve Antropoloji*¹²⁴ shed light on the Ottoman and republican efforts to carve out a place for Turks within the Caucasian race. Nevertheless, the official efforts to elevate the racial status of Turks has not eradicated the ambiguity surrounding the Turkish racial identity altogether. So long as the racial identity of Turks remains as ambiguous as it did in the nineteenth century, research on this topic will yield fascinating studies.

¹²⁴ Zafer Toprak, *Cumhuriyet ve Antropoloji* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2021).

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