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Ottoman Policy in the Ottoman-Iranian Borderland during the late 19th Century: The Case of Ebeĝe

Geç 19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Devleti'nin Osmanlı-İran Sınır Bölgesindeki Politikası: Ebeĝe Örneĝi

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Abstract: *In most Ottoman studies, tribes and tribal confederations are voiceless and faceless and they do not have representation as historical agents in their own past. Most anthropological studies mention this methodological problem, though the some Ottomanists still resist it. In this research, I examined two rival tribal confederations of the same region. Tribe-state relations are questioned and the modernist-positivist approach is criticized. Since the region was a borderland, our research also becomes a case study for border studies. Specifically, the Haydaran and Jalali tribal confederations and their politico-economic relations to the both the Ottoman and Qajar Empires are discussed during the late 19th century. In this study, tribes are not simply primordial social subjects, but politico-territorial powers. As a result of this study, I assert that during the late 19th century, the Ottoman Empire used the tribes as a tool in order to enlarge its own territorial powers. In doing so, tribes were also empowered by acting together with the state. Therefore, center-periphery relations were not always contradictory as the modernist approach always described. Even though the Ottoman Sublime Port attempted to centralize the rule of its provinces, the Ottoman-Iranian borderland of the northern regions remained de-centralized. This does not mean that the central government lost power; to the contrary, empowering a non-state subject ensured Ottoman control over the land in an indirect way. The Sublime Port also used the military might of the tribal confederation at its margins. This was not a marginal part of Ottoman practice; to the contrary, it was the real nature of center-periphery relations.*

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, Tribe, Qajars, Borderlands, Haydaran, Jalali

Öz: *Çoĝu Osmanlı Tarihi çalışmlarında, aşiret ve aşiretsel konfederasyonlar sesleri ve yüzleri olmayan ve temsiliyetleri bulunmayan gruplardır. Çoĝu antropolojik çalışma bu metodolojik eksikliĝi vurgulamıştır fakat bazı Osmanlı tarihçileri bu konuda çalışmalarında halen direnç göstermektedirler. Bu çalışmada aynı bölgenin iki rakip aşiretleri incelenmiştir. Devlet-aşiret ilişkileri sorgulanmış ve modernist-pozitivist görüş kritiĝe tabi tutulmuştur. Çalışılan mekânın sınır bölgesi olmasından dolayı bu çalışmamız aynı zamanda sınır çalışmalarının da pratik bir örneĝidir. Spesifik olarak Haydaran ve Celali aşiret konfederasyonları hakkında ve onların iki imparatorluk olan Osmanlı ve Qajar İran ile olan politik-ekonomik ilişkileri 19. yüzyılın sonları çerçevesinde tartışılmıştır. Birlikte var olma ve bir diğere güç kazandırma Osmanlı-İran sınır bölgesindeki merkez-çevre ilişkisinin doğasını oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışmada aşiretler ilkel sosyal gruplar değil, politik-bölgesel güçlerdir. Sonuç olarak 19. yüzyılın sonlarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun kendi toprak kazanımlarını artırma noktasında aşiretleri araç olarak kullandığı savunulmaktadır. Aynı zamanda aşiretlerin devlet ile birlikte çalışması bu aşiretlere güç kazandırmıştır. Bu yüzden merkez-çevre ilişkileri modernist yaklaşımların belirttiği gibi daima karşılık üzerine dayalı olmamıştır. Osmanlı hükümeti her ne kadar vilayet yönetimlerini merkezileştirmeye çalışmış olsa da, Osmanlı-İran sınır bölgesinin kuzey bölgeleri de-sentralize olarak kalmaya devam etmiştir. Bu, merkezi yönetimin bir güç kaybına uğradığı anlamını taşımadığı gibi, tam tersine devlet olmayan bir gücün bölge yönetimini dolaylı olarak Osmanlı tarafına kazandırmış olması anlamına gelmektedir. Merkezi hükümet aynı zamanda aşiretlerin askeri kabiliyetlerini de bu şekilde kullanmış olmaktadır. Bu Osmanlı*

hükümetinin marjinal bir pratiği olmasının tersine, merkez-çevre ilişkilerinin daha gerçekçi doğasını sergilemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı Devleti, Aşiret, Kaçarlılar, Sınır, Haydaran, Celali

1. Introduction

During the summer of 1890, a clash occurred in a tribal zone of the Ottoman-Iranian borderland between the two tribal confederations: the Haydaran and the Jalali. A son of a chief from the Jalali side was killed by members of the Haydaran tribe. This was the beginning of a big dispute between the two tribes and it continued until the year 1896. The main cause for this dispute was related to capturing summer pastures of a region called Ebeğe¹. Since Jalalis were the subject of the Iranian state and the Haydarans were Ottoman, these local clashes evolved into bureaucratic matters between the two empires.

This study explores the mission of the Ottoman state into a tribal zone, which at the same time was an Ottoman-Iranian borderland. By using the case of Ebeğe, this study intends to show how the Ottoman bureaucrats approached the margins of the state during this period. Since the borders were not yet clear-cut, we can see from this study that the Ottomans did not abdicate their own expansionist mission with respect to land and tribal subjects. At the same time the study attempts to visualize the case of the tribal units together with their missions and desires based on the Ottoman records even though they were mostly written from a state-centered perspective.

2. Discourse of the Ottoman Records

Before engaging in an analysis of the role of tribal entities in Ottoman border policies, it is necessary to clarify certain aspects of the rhetoric found in the documents upon which much of this analysis is based. As every state bureaucracy centers its own missions within its own discourse, this also applied to Ottomans manuscripts. While this case becomes an opportunity to be able to analyze the missions of the Ottoman state, at the same time we need to be careful about coming under influence of the power of state-centered rhetoric. To be more exemplary for our case, we can see the power of the state-centered voice in these documents for the case of Ebeğe.

The Ottomans mostly described the Iranian subjects of the Jalali Tribe as bandits during the conflicts of Ebeğe, especially because the Haydaran, their most powerful enemy, were Ottoman subjects. Even though in the Ebeğe region both tribal units attempted to control the pastures, because the Haydaran submitted their loyalty to the Ottomans, the Jalalis were called bandits.² Some Jalalis were subjects of the Ottoman Empire, living in the *sancaq* of Bayazid, but because they submitted their loyalty to the Ottomans but not to the Iranians, within Ottoman discourse there were good and bad Jalalis at the same time in the same region. This case indicates that the Ottomans prioritized their relations to tribal subjects in proportion to their acceptance of Ottoman dominance in this borderland. Therefore, while some members of the Jalali tribe appeared as Ottoman subjects, some others were accused of banditry because they were conceptualized as unknown and foreign groups.

¹ I prefer to use the name of the region as Ebeğe since the current local people call it with this pronunciation. Some other researchers translate the Ottoman calligraphy of the name as Abaga or Abağa. Even the Ottoman records sometimes misspell the name. In this case, the current calling of the region by the locals seems more accurate version of the name.

² BOA, Y.A. RES. 54-10.



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In the region of Ebeğ, tribal members of Haydaran carried out the representation of Ottoman subjecthood against Iranian subjects and state powers. Even though there were some Haydarans who were subjects of the Iranian state, the Ottomans did not call these Iranian subjects of the Haydaran tribe bandits in their records because the Ottomans used these units as a tool for their own missions. When the ruler of the Iranian city of Qerani, Tahir Khan of Haydaran, assaulted the region, the Ottoman records did not use a harsh discourse as much as they did for the assaults of the Jalalis.³ In other words, the discourse of “banditry” was not a simple usage of the state but specifically represented state projects in the Ottoman- Iranian borderland.

The Ottoman bureaucrats mostly attempted to censor the record and cover up offenses by its own subjects if the other side was a subject of Iran. Before and during peace negotiations being held between the officials of the two states in the city of Bayazid, information from the Ottoman correspondence records indicates that the Ottomans mostly cared about how the Iranian subjects, Jalalis, committed crimes against their own subjects but not what their own Haydaran tribe did to the other side. We also understand this from the Iranian correspondence report sent from Iran to Istanbul.⁴ Iranians also focused on the attacks of the Ottoman subjects to its own Jalali tribe. And in this way, both sides mostly centered the assertions of their own tribal subjects and mentioned how they were victimized by the other.

Identification of the tribal subjects in the written Ottoman records also represent with whom the Ottomans concurred. According to the records, the Ottomans identified its own subjects of the Haydarans as “our”⁵, and Jalalis as “Iranian”⁶. Even though both tribal units were living in disputed lands of the Ottoman-Iranian borderland, the subjecthood was not based on the land but the loyalty of these mobile tribal subjects. Therefore, the Ottoman discourse in the documents conceptualized Haydaran as an “Ottoman” tribe but the Jalali as “Iranian” or “foreign”. Again, the rhetoric of the Ottoman state bureaucracy was shaped by a combination of both imperial and local developments. Protecting the rights of the Ottoman subjects, Haydaran, and the right of the state were overemphasized in these documents and they were equated.⁷ The Ottoman state-centered documents, therefore, appear as a quite politicized declaration of a state agenda rather than a true absolute representation of the past, even though some Ottomanists do not make this important distinction.⁸

3. Borderland and the Tribes

The region of Ebeğ consisted of highland pastures located between the Ottoman cities of Bayazid and Bergiri (current city of Muradiye) and the Iranian cities of Maku and Ovacik. These pastures were shared by Kurdish tribes, who submitted their loyalty to one or the other of those states. Both empires attempted to control these very abundant pastures by using “their” tribes. Two of the most powerful tribal confederations were the Haydaran and the Jalali. As I mentioned above, the Haydaran were working with the Ottomans while the Jalali were loyal largely to the Iranian state.

³ BOA, BEO 476-35658 and BOA, BEO 490-36718.

⁴ BOA, Y.A.RES 54-10.

⁵ “Bizim Haydaranlı Aşireti”.

⁶ “İrannın Celali Aşireti”.

⁷ BOA, Y.A.RES 54-10.

⁸ Yakup Karataş, *Bayezid Sancağı ve Idarecileri (1700-1914)* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2014).



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As Adelman and Aron discuss in their article, and parallel to their conceptualization, the pastures of Ebeğ appear to us as a borderland during the late 19th century.⁹ According to the writers, there is an evolutionary development from *frontier* to *borderland* and lastly to *bordered lands*. They think that the last period, *bordered land*, was a product of strict policies on the part of nation-states which mostly attempted to cut their borders based on clear geographical demarcations. However, the concept of frontier is a reference to a much more flexible region, one in which the locals and actors on the margins of the empire enjoyed varying degrees of autonomous power. Between these two concepts, *frontier* and *bordered land*, they think that there is a transition period, which they called *borderland*. The locals are much less free from interventions by the state center, and the frontier is diminished to a more limited area. However, there remains ambiguity regarding who controls the land because the locals are still in power. Similar to Adelman and Aron's conceptualization, the pastures of Ebeğ fit their concept of borderland. The Ottoman eastern region was mostly directed via Kurdish Emirates until the mid-19th century and they were mostly autonomous in character. However, when the Ottoman state bureaucracy needed to control the land directly and needed more cash, they de-centralized the rule of the Ottoman eastern provinces, and the frontier of the Ottoman eastern regions evolved into more directly ruled districts. However, the land of Ebeğ was still part of a major discussion between the two states. At this point, the region called Ebeğ, as defined above, was controlled by mobile tribal units. Referring again to peace negotiations, the Ottoman bureaucrats mention that "since we did not create our borders yet Iranian officials might resist our terminology if we mention that the Iranian Jalalis crossed the border and assaulted our Haydaran Tribe".¹⁰ Hence, the pastures of Ebeğ were still a borderland and it consisted of more than three hundred villages according to one Ottoman record.¹¹ While at the top level the two states attempted to control the land since they still had expansionist policies, at local level, the tribal units also wanted to use the pastures of Ebeğ for their husbandry necessities. Parallel to each other, states and tribes sought to enlarge their rule on this land by getting assistance from each other and the power of state and tribe co-evolved.

Tribes were not simply primordial and primitive subjects as positivist-modernist thinking generally concludes. On the contrary, they were socio-political structures accommodating varied identities via unification and shared a group identity for self-identification.¹² This mélange of tribes even created mythic ancestry which helped them to unite under a royal family.¹³ These tribes acted similarly to the policies of empire, especially regarding having expansionist desires. They, state and tribe, both used each other's power in order to enlarge their lands. At this point tribe stood for a representation of state and they acted as a state

⁹ Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North America History," *The American Historical Review* (Jun, 1999), 814- 841.

¹⁰ BOA, BEO 93-6969.

¹¹ BOA, MVL 574-93. In this document Haydaranli Ali Agha was referred as a person who rebuilt over than 300 villages in Ebeğ and filled these villages with population.

¹² Lois Beck, "Tribes and the State in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century" ed. Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, *Tribes and States Formation in the Middle East* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), 115-185. Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014), 46.

¹³ The current members of Haydaran tribe think that they have four clans and the leaders of these clans were the brothers of each other. However, there are not any provable documentation to prove this if we look at the sources. Contrary, they were separate unities came under the rule of a single charismatic family and the Haydaran became one of the dominant powers of the region. Mark Sykes, "The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 38 (1908).



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ideological apparatus.¹⁴ If the Haydaran tribe gathered more land and controlled more of the region of Ebeğe, it meant that the state, the Ottomans, also gathered and controlled the land. As is mentioned the documents, “our bureaucrats must protect the rights of our subjects, Haydarans, and the rights of the state”.¹⁵ Therefore, the Ottomans acted very carefully with respect to the case of Ebeğe because there was an indirect expansionism toward their enemy, the Iranian Qajar State. During this period of the late 19th century, the Ottomans also needed to bring about a new order in the Ottoman eastern region because their interests were in danger in the eyes of Ottoman bureaucrats.

4. Hamidian Cavalry Units

Before returning to the peace committee meetings, which were held between the officials of the two states in order to “solve” the struggle between the rival Haydaran and Jalali tribes, we need to mention a very significant innovation by the Abdulhamid II for creating a balance of power between the state and the tribes in the Ottoman-Iranian borderland: the Hamidian Cavalry Units.

Hamidian Cavalry units were created in 1891 by Abdulhamid II among the Sunni tribal units of the Ottoman Empire. Most of the tribes were Kurdish and the real mission was to control the Armenians and the tribal leaders. While some historians thought that the Hamidian Cavalry Units mostly became successful for controlling the Kurds rather than the Armenians¹⁶, some others believed that this act was a preliminary resistance to a possible Kurdish national movement.¹⁷ Especially after the de-centralization of the rule of the Ottoman eastern lands when the Kurdish emirates were abolished from the power after mid-19th century, the region became more chaotic because the local tribes were not controlled by local royal families anymore; therefore, there was a power vacuum until the Hamidian Cavalry Units were created.

The Ottomans regularly used the military might of the tribes and the main military power of the empire on the margins depended on tribal units. Tribes also had an autonomous character and Abdulhamid II wanted to control them and use their military power for the sake of the state’s agenda. While the empire had many fiscal and military losses, the Kurds stood as a potential power against the Ottoman central authority because the Iranians and the Russians also attempted to control these politicized politico-territorial powers for their own purposes.¹⁸

When the struggle of Ebeğe occurred, the Ottomans mostly worried whether its own Haydaran and Jalali tribes might start to have a war between them. This was a very dangerous possibility in the eyes of the Ottoman bureaucrats because the Ottomans actually could have only controlled its eastern borderland if they controlled the relations of its own tribal militarized units. Beyond this case, both Haydaran and Jalali tribes of the Ottoman Empire joined the Hamidian units and they were not only tribal confederations anymore but a part of an Ottoman royal army. We can see these concerns expressed in the documents: “it is not caiz (religiously licit) currently if clashes appear between the tribes”¹⁹ Also in some documents the Ottoman bureaucrats appear very suspicious about the eruption of a war between their own

¹⁴ “Haydaranlıların oteden beru bunlarla mukabeleye kudreyab olarak hukuku devleti ve kendi hukuklarını muhafaza etmekte iseler de” BOA, Y.A.RES 54-10-11: This sentence mentions that the tribe protected the rights of the state and their own.

¹⁵ BOA, Y.A.RES 54-10-11.

¹⁶ Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Osman Aytar, *Hamidiye Alaylarından Köy Koruculuğu’na* (Istanbul: Medya Güneşi, 1992).

¹⁸ P.I. Averyanov, *Osmanlı İran Rus Savaşlarında Kürtler* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2010).

¹⁹ BOA, Y.PRK.ASK 62-79: “...zamanen ve halen gayri caiz olduğu...”.



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subjects of the two tribes because they knew that tribal identities might have brought the entirety of the Haydaran and the Jalali against each other.²⁰ The developments regarding the case of Ebeğ, therefore, advanced in the shadow of imperial project of Hamidian Cavalry Units.

5. Peace committee and its mission

When the assaults started between these two tribal confederations in 1890, the Ottoman bureaucrats knew that the two confederations were going to have revenge against each other; that there was a blood feud already started between them. At the outset, a son of a Jalali chief was killed and later the Jalalis killed eight members of Haydaran Tribe of Ottoman subjects. The next year, both sides, the Ottomans and the Iranians, agreed to create a peace committee in the place of origin where the assaults began. The officials of the Ottoman state and Qajar Iran met in the city of Bayazid. Bayazid was one of those garrisoned cities of the Ottoman Empire to the Iranian and Russian borderland at that time. However, who would be appointed to this committee was not an easy process for the Sublime Port.

There are a number of Ottoman documents that circulated among the ministries of internal affairs, foreign affairs, commander in chief (*seraskerlik*) and grand vizier's office on the subject of appointing officials. At the end, the Ottoman central government decided to choose their representatives from among the local bureaucrats. The head of the Ottoman committee was Hamdi Bey who was a *müdde-i umumi* (public prosecutor) in the city of Bidlis. Others were *kaimimakam* (Lieutenant Colonel) Salih Bey, a *yüzbaşı* (lieutenant) from the city of Erciş, Mehmed Izzet as a *katip* (clerk), and a witness from the region of Agah.²¹ These committee members were assigned to the mission and the Sublime Port forced them to begin their meetings as soon as possible. But both sides, the Ottoman officials and the Iranians, acted slowly in initiating this process. According to the Ottoman records, the Iranian officials came from the city of Tebriz and their numbers were equal in number to the Ottoman committee. The head of the committee, Hamdi Bey, received 3000 *gurush*, Salih 1250, Agah 350, Mehmed Izzet 416, and lately appointed vice-public prosecutor of Bayazid, Hafız Bey, received 1400 *gurush* monthly.²² These were the same amounts earned on their previous jobs and they were paid twice as the result of their assignment to this mission. Plus, they were also paid an extra monthly salary for daily allowance. So, the numbers of the committee members were five in total and they were paid thrice for this job. These payments show how much importance the Sublime Port attached to this case during a period when the central government had major budget concerns. And in the year 1896 the grand vizier, Kamil Pasha, complained about the ineffectiveness of the committee and the expenses of the assignment to the Ottoman state treasury.²³

The Sublime Port prepared a manuscript for the Ottoman representatives on the committee and this manuscript specified which topics were seen as most significant for them and what the representatives should follow as a rule in the meetings. It consisted of eleven articles and it was co-written by internal affairs, foreign affairs, and office of the commander in chief, and office of the grand vizier.²⁴

²⁰ BOA, Y.PRK.SRN 2-79.

²¹ BOA, Y.A.RES 54-10.

²² BOA, DH.MKT 159-2.

²³ BOA, DH. MKT 30-13.

²⁴ BOA, Y.A.RES. 54-10.



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These meetings started late because the Iranian members of the committee were not eager to attend. Even when the harvest period came, they wanted to leave the committee and suspend the meetings until the harvest time had passed.²⁵ Also, some Ottoman documents mention that because they were not powerful enough as representative of the Iranian state, their decisions could not work to bring “peace” to the region. Timur Khan, the ruler of Iranian city of Maku, was accused of this conflict by the Ottoman side as he had militarized the Iranian Jalalis and the Iranian representatives were not powerful enough to give orders to Timur Khan according to the Ottoman representatives on the committee.

Committee meetings continued until the year 1896, when the two states agreed that the problems were not solvable and that is why only blood payment should be received from the tribes. The Jalalis were to pay blood money to the Ottoman Haydaran because they had killed six more people. The payment was decided according to tribal customs. Three of six people were *agha* (tribal chief) of the Haydaran, therefore their blood payments were higher than other regular members of the tribes. For each victim the Jalalis had to pay one hundred yearling sheep (*toklu*- one year old ram) and fifty milch sheeps. However, for the blood payment for the three tribal chiefs they had to pay fifty more milch sheeps. The total the Jalalis had to pay to the Haydaran tribe was six hundred yearling sheeps and 450 milch sheeps. This was to be collected not only from the killers of the victims but from all the Jalali tribes that were loyal to the Iranians.²⁶ This case shows that the tribes had considerable autonomy and this was that only possible way the officials of the two imperial states could solve the problems was according to tribal law. The states could not impose their own rules on the tribes because their relations to these local powers were much more complicated. They needed to satisfy their own tribal units in order to keep them on their side.

Overall, the committee remained under pressure from the Sublime Port and they became something of a scapegoat because they were stuck between the missions of the states and the desires of the tribes at the local level. The officials were paid quite well and it shows that the imperial center did not want to confront the conflicts among the Ottoman tribes because the Ottomans also had subjects among the Jalali tribe living in the city of Bayazid. Maybe that is why the committee met in Bayazid, to control its own Jalali tribe. Also, this shows that the identities were not much shaped by Ottomanness or Iranianness, but on the contrary, that the populations were identified based on their tribal identities. The concepts of Ottomanness or Iranianness on the part of these subjects seem rather to have been a self-reflection on the part of the Sublime Port reflecting how they wanted to see their own subjects living at the margins of the state.

6. Dilemma between status quo and expansionism

As the case of Ebeğe shows us, the policies of Ottoman central authority were caught between the idea of keeping the tribes peaceful, which I call a case of maintaining the status quo, and the idea of enlarging its land and population. The Ottomans did not want its own tribes have a war against each other and kept them in control for its own purposes by creating the Hamidian Cavalry Units. A clash would not allow the Sublime Porte to give maintain authority over the military section of the tribes. However, the Ottomans still wanted to get more lands and power, which in this case was equal to the tribal population. The Ottomans had to empower and satisfy the tribal chiefs in the Iranian borderland during the 1890s; otherwise, the chiefs might have preferred to work with the Russians or the Iranians.

²⁵ BOA, BEO 318-23814.

²⁶ BOA, BEO 568- 42543.



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The fundamental motive for the disputes between the Haydaran and Jalali tribes was related to controlling the pastures of Ebeğ in 1890s. According to Mehmed Hursid Paşa, who was on the committee charged with the border-making process during the mid-nineteenth century, Ebeğ was a fertile land and tribes wanted to control these pastures for their own husbandry. For him, the original locals of the region were Yezidi Kurds and they were dispelled from the region because of the assaults of the tribes who regularly came to Ebeğ during the summer season.²⁷

The pastures of Ebeğ stayed as a stateless land during the late 19th century too because the both the Ottoman and Iranian states urged to keep these pastures in control of the tribe that submitted their loyalty to them. The Iranian Jalalis were supported and militarized by the ruler of Maku, Timur Khan.²⁸ The Haydaran tribe was also accused in the same manner by the Iranian officials. According to one document, the Haydarans were supported by an Ottoman *miralay* (colonel) who was sent to Ebeğ from the Ottoman city of Van, and for the Iranians he was the main player of the conflicts.²⁹ The Ottomans wanted to ignore this and both states did not want to admit their own role in this conflict. They mostly focused on how to become dominant in this land.

When the conflicts started, the Ottoman documents mention that the Iranians did not accept the assertions of the Ottoman officials: the pastures of Ebeğ belonged to the Ottomans.³⁰ This was an important case to officially accept that the land belonged one of those side, since if the Iranians had accepted that Ebeğ belonged to the Ottomans, the attacks of its own subjects would have become responsible for passing the border and assaulting the other side. The Ottoman officials knew that the Iranians would not fall this fault and they corresponded between the representatives in the committee and Istanbul on this case for how to put the problem into words. The center warned them to write: “The tribe of Haydaran which is a subject of Holy Reign (*saltanatı seniyye*) was attacked by the Jalalis and there were nineteen of them killed”.³¹ *Dersaadet* even advised the committee members that the borderland, Ebeğ, did not belong to either side, and the committee members should use this rhetoric in order to defend the rights of the Haydaran. However, they did not share this correspondence with the Iranians since both sides still claimed the land. Land distribution and control of it in the borderland were carried out via the policies of tribes and tribal subjects. And both states extended their expansionist policies using the tribes who submitted their loyalty to them.

This conflict was not a simple conflict of tribes but rather it carried a potential for a big war which might have expanded to “the boundaries of Kurdistan, Luristan and Azerbaijan” as an Ottoman document literally mentions.³² Sometimes, over a thousand cavalry and infantry warriors of the tribes joined this war from the Jalali side.³³ The Ottomans also sometimes sent its own Hamidian units to the region in order to demonstrate their own power to the other side. So, the conflict was not a regular and simplistic one, rather it might have turned to an inter-

²⁷ Mehmed Hurşid Paşa, *Seyahatname-i Hudud* (tr. Alaattin Eser), (Istanbul: Simurg, 1997), 238.

²⁸ BOA, BEO 568- 42543.

²⁹ BOA, Y. PRK. EŞA 11-51.

³⁰ BOA, Y. A.RES 54-10.

³¹ BOA, BEO 93-6969: “tabi saltanatı seniyyeden haydaranlı aşireti mevkiinde Celali tarafından vurulup haydaranlı aşireti halkından 19 katlı olduğu”. “hudud neresidir henüz karargir olmadı bahanesiyle mazbata-ı mezkureyi kabul etmeyecekleri” (since where the border is was not decided they will not sign the documentations).

³² BOA, MV 60-63.

³³ BOA, Y.PRK.SRN 2-79. This number sometimes reached to 2000 tribal cavalries. BOA, BEO 429-32103.



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state war between the Qajar and Ottoman Empires.³⁴ Therefore, the Ottomans spent extra efforts at this time to solve this problem.

Why the empires organized this committee at this time but not before is because the tribes were not voiceless and faceless subjects, but important agents and had politico-territorial power. As explained above, the tribal units were not anymore a single confederation but rather had been turned into a part of a state army. These tribal armies were militarized by the state but in practice they carried on their structures. Even though land was important, the power of the tribe and their loyalty to the state was much more crucial, and the state had to satisfy its own tribes to keep them on their side. Together with this importance, it was also important to enlarge the land and this revenue was going to be given to the leaders of the tribe. So, even though the acquisition of land remained at the center of this conflict, the desires of the empires attached significance to the tribes because they were much more useful tools than the land itself.

As an important example, when the war of 1821-23 started between the Ottomans and Qajar Iran, the foremost representative of the Sultan in the Ottoman eastern region, the *beglerbegi* of Erzurum, collected only 2000 soldiers. However, a hereditary ruler of Muş, a sub-district of Erzurum, Selim Pasha, collected 8000 cavalry from among the tribes. Selim Pasha did not send his army to the war and the Ottomans accused him of treason and blamed him for losing the war. A few years later he was beheaded and the rule of Muş was given to his son, Emin Pasha.³⁵ This case was not an isolated one, on the contrary, it illustrates that the main army of the Ottoman Empire in the eastern borderland was composed of the tribal forces. They were mostly nomadic by tradition and they always had to be armed against the attacks of other tribes, especially because the region was de-centralized after the dissolution of the local Emirs who were intermediary powers between the state and tribal forces.³⁶ After de-centralization, every single and powerful tribe or tribal confederation appeared as candidates to fill this gap. This power vacuum was re-filled by the tribes, and they appeared as new patrons in the Ottoman eastern borderland: The Hamidian Cavalry Commanders.³⁷ Even though they were more centrally ruled, they empowered themselves by co-evolving with the state during the Hamidian Era. State rulers realized that they needed to work with these local political actors and these tribal rulers appeared more powerful than even before.³⁸

If we return to our discussion, in the shadow of these developments, when the case of Ebeğe appeared, both states were still arguing about the matter whose tribe the Haydaran were? The Iranians did not accept the claims that the Haydaran tribe were an Ottoman subject. The Iranians also had Haydaran subjects and even Tahir Khan, a Haydaran chief, was at the same time the *khan* of Qereni.³⁹ However, the Ottomans forced the Iranians to approve this claim that the Haydaran were Ottoman subjects in order to legalize their relation to the tribe. The Ottomans did not want to pursue this claim anymore since the Iranians knew that this was a diplomatic approach of the Ottoman bureaucrats and the committee officials mainly focused on solving the conflicts between the Jalali and the Haydaran tribes. These arguments demonstrate that the Ottomans still kept their mission of attracting the tribal populations from

³⁴ BOA, BEO 359-26921.

³⁵ Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Tarih-i Cevdet XI*, 1301.

³⁶ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992).

³⁷ Klein, *ibid*.

³⁸ Huseyin Pasha of Haydaran, Mustafa Pasha of Miran and Ibrahim Pasha of Milan were the most powerful actors in the Hamidian Cavalry Units.

³⁹ BOA, BEO 490-36719.



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Iranian and Russian lands. Even a Russian commander during this period, Averyanov, mentions that Russian government paid lots of money to attract the tribal population to their lands in order to use their military might against the other empires.⁴⁰ Hence, the Ottomans had to work closely with the Haydaran in the case of Ebeğe. Otherwise, the Ottoman state and its power might have become meaningless in the eyes of tribal chiefs and they might have preferred to ally with another state in this borderland. In this way, the Ottomans might have lost the control of land, Ebeğe, the population, and military power.

The status of the tribal chiefs was determined according to whether the leader submitted the group's loyalty to the state. There was a narrow line between being a respected tribal ruler or a bandit (*eşkiya*). The relations between the state and tribe were fragile and the central authority always saw them as a potential threat to state power because the land itself was a borderland and it was far from the central regions of the empire to control. This gave the tribe an alternative to choose among the states to work with. Therefore, the agendas of states were also sometimes shaped by the desires of the tribe chieftains. The empires had to conceptualize their policies according to these complex structures and developments. At this point, it is not hard to see why the Ottomans regarded the Haydaran carefully.

In the example of Ebeğe toward the end of the work by the committee, an Ottoman governor gave these suggestions to the center: "Since the people of Ebeğe consisted of Kurds and those of joined Hamidian cavalries, its ruler must be an intellectual and honorable to direct the civil service (*mulkiye*), and also he must be credited and should be seen friendly to be able to rule. He also should be chosen among the military class (*askeri sahane*)".⁴¹ The governor of Van, Major General Bahri, advised the Sublime Port to make Ebeğe a sub-district (*kaza*) rather than keeping its status as a village in order to control the land more directly. As much as we see from these ideas of governor of Van, the main focus was to how to gain the approval of the locals. The ruler of Ebeğe must be friendly because the chiefs might not ally with the ruler and also he must be a charismatic person in order to be listened to by the locals.

Lastly, in order to understand the policies of the Ottoman state on the Iranian borderland, an Ottoman document gives us a significant perspective. In a document, the Ottoman officials communicated to the Iranian officials regarding an attack of the Iranian tribes on an Iranian subject. In this document, when Iranian subjects were attacked, they were in the Ottoman lands and the Ottoman officials wanted the Iranian officials to criminalize the attackers and their supporters.⁴² Why would the Ottoman officials have cared about Iranian subjects even though they were illegally in their lands? The Ottomans probably wanted to attract more population to their lands by projecting an image of a fair rule, but also it might have been a message to the Iranian officials to illustrate how objective their reports were. Whatever their real mission was, both sides show that during the late 19th century the Ottoman borderland in Ebeğe was quite fragile and the Ottomans wanted to use it for their own purposes. Contrary to what most historians have claimed, there was not a clear-cut border yet and the tribes were the main players in this imperial/local game. The local populations appeared more important than the land itself and borderland discussion were not only centered on discussions about the land. The Haydaran tribe and its role was a case which helps us to see the structure in the Ottoman eastern borderland during the 1890s. It was not an isolated case to be seen as a marginal practice, rather these examples can be found throughout the Ottoman eastern borderland if further research can be pursued.

⁴⁰ Averyanov, *ibid.*

⁴¹ BOA, DH.MKT 30-13.

⁴² BOA, DH.MKT. 30-13.



7. Conclusion

This micro-study on the case of Ebeğë and the Haydaran and Jalali tribes indicates that the Ottoman mission to rule its eastern borderland during the late 19th century was dominantly based on expansionism by way of using the local tribes against the Iranian Qajars as an apparatus of the state. The Ottoman policy for this borderland was not a marginal or exceptional one as historians have mostly suggested. Rather, the Ottomans applied pragmatic policies in their mission and they did not prioritize a single mission for their aims. Tribal constructions did not appear as a power broker of the state, rather they mostly represented state power in Ebeğë since the most powerful tribes allied with the state power for pragmatic purposes. Historians often counterpose the policies of the state and the tribe, and since they have modernist insights, they believe that a state cannot collaborate with a tribal unit and vice versa. However, as our case shows, a tribe represents more than a tribal structure and they were on an equal footing with land, population, and the royal army. The Ottomans centralized and approved the desires of the tribes and they both allied together to get more profits in practice. A powerful tribe and state coexisted and empowered each other in this borderland. In this way, Ottoman central administration improved its power by keeping Ebeğë de-centralized and center-periphery relations were not contradictory in real practice.

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