

The Road Leading to French Imperialism in Syria through the Lens of Edward Said's *Orientalism*

Edward Said'in Oryantalizm Merceğinden Suriye'deki Fransız Emperyalizmine Giden Yol

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Abstract: *Orientalism, which Edward Said wrote in 1978, was among the masterpieces of the 20th century, as the ideas it presented served to give direction to colonial, post-colonial and cultural fields of academic study. In his work, Edward Said describes Orientalism as the East (the Orient) being spoken about and represented by the West (the Occident) via various institutions, academic and literary works, doctrines, and colonization policies. According to Said, the Orientalist doctrine, which various rulers, authors, poets, philosophers, and political scientists created, generated a plethora of systematical information and theories related to Eastern people and traditions; and this information served to create a distorted Eastern image. These depictions and, ultimately, stereotypes were textualized such that they overlapped with Western ambitions and interests, and enabled the West to Easternize the East. This academic study analyzes the political, economic, and cultural policies France pursued from Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt, to the end of France's 26-years mandate regime in Syria. Further, this paper assesses the points at which France's approach to Syrian society intersects with Edwards Said's opinions regarding Orientalism.*

Keywords: *Edward Said, Orientalism, French Imperialism, Syria, mandate rule*

Öz: *1978 yılında Edward Said tarafından kaleme alınan Oryantalizm, öne sürdüğü yaklaşım ve fikirleriyle 20.yy'ın önde gelen yapıları arasında yerini almış ve kolonyal, post-kolonyal ve kültürel çalışmalara önemli ölçüde yön vermiştir. Edward Said bu eserinde, Oryantalizmi, Şark'ın Garp tarafından kurumlar, akademik ve edebi çalışmalar ve hatta sömürge politikalarıyla dile getirilmesi ve temsil edilmesi olarak tanımlamıştır. Said'e göre, Oryantalist doktrinde, içlerinde çeşitli romancıların, ozanların, felsefecilerin, siyaset bilimcilerin ve imparatorluk yöneticilerinin bulunduğu yazarlar ekibi, Şark halklarına ve geleneklere ilişkin sistematik bir bilgiler ve teoriler yığını üretmekte ve üretilen bu bilgiler çarpıtılmış bir Şark imgesinin yaratılmasına hizmet etmektedir. Şarka ilişkin bu tasvirler ve klişeler, Garp'ın arzu ve çıkarlarıyla örtüşecek şekilde metinselleştirilmesine ve Şark'ın Garplılarca Şarklaştırılmasına yol açmıştır. Bu akademik çalışma, Napolyon Bonapart'ın Mısır'ı işgalinden başlayarak Suriye'deki 26 yıllık Fransız mandasının sonlanmasına kadar Fransa'nın izlemiş olduğu siyasi, ekonomik ve kültürel politikaları analiz etmektedir. İlaveten, bu çalışma Fransa'nın Suriye toplumuna olan yaklaşımı ile Edward Said'in Oryantalizm'e ilişkin görüşlerinin kesiştiği noktaları da değerlendirmektedir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Edward Said, Oryantalizm, Fransız Emperyalizmi, Suriye, manda yönetimi*

Introduction

Orientalism, which was written by Edward Said in 1978,¹ has not only been counted among the masterpieces of the 20th century, but the ideas it proposes have effectively shaped academic studies in colonial, post-colonial, and cultural areas. In his academic work, Edward

¹ Edward Said, *Şarkiyatçılık: Batının Şark Arayışları*. (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2003).

Said described Orientalism as the East (the Orient) being spoken of and represented in the West (the Occident) via various institutions, academic and literary works, doctrines, and colonization policies.² According to Said, the Orientalist doctrine, which rulers, authors, poets, philosophers, and political scientists created, generated considerable systematical information and theories related to the Eastern people and traditions, which in turn served to create a *Eastern image*.³ These depictions, which were generated and textualized such that they overlapped with the West's ambitions and interests, allowed for Westerners to Easternize the East. These depictions also brought about lasting stereotypes that have long been applied to the people of the East and Eastern culture.⁴

Orientalism stemmed neither just from the West's innocent exploration of the East nor from the curiosity it felt regarding the Eastern people and culture. Rather, Orientalism was shaped via the literal academic and political discourses that were produced as a result of Westerners' travels to the East when, sometimes, they had no real experience related to the East, and from the West's desire to dominate the East.⁵ Essentially, Orientalists produced distorted depictions of and information regarding the East, and that permitted the West to re-define itself relative to the East in order to establish its hegemony over the Orient. For instance, in the Orientalist doctrine, while the West was described as rational, peaceful, and modern, the East was depicted as irrational, fond of sexuality, and devoid of capacity to develop itself.⁶ Orientalism suggested that the West was the East's savior, as the West would bring modernity and enlightenment to the East, and it would enable the East to be better represented in the world thanks to the West's presence in Eastern countries. This granted the West the legitimacy it needed to colonize the East.

Although it was not exclusive to the British and French, through Orientalism, which materialized along with the increased dominance of Britain and France throughout the world, the European countries identified the East (the Orient) not just as the neighbor to the West, but also a space where the Europe's most extensive, wealthiest, and ancient colonies were found, and where Europe's most dangerous cultural rival existed.⁷ Orientalist studies conducted in Britain and France focused on some of the differences that existed between the East and the West, but these studies focused primarily on the ways in which the East posed a constant problem for the West.⁸ This justified the West's intentions to eliminate the threat by assuming control of and dominating the East. Additionally, according to Said, from the outset, the Orientalist doctrine and the West's mission to colonize the East worked collaboratively.⁹ For instance, per Orientalism, *veil* did not solely represent a cloth that Muslim women in the East might use; it was also a means of concealing from the West all of the East's mysteries,¹⁰ and a primary desire of the West was to lift the veil of the Easterner so as to learn what was formerly unknown and thus dominate the East.¹¹ As such, in accordance with Orientalism, the extent to which the West could approach the East and thereby gain knowledge regarding Eastern political, cultural and economic life would determine how easily the West could dominate the

² Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

³ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

⁴ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

⁵ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

⁶ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

⁷ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, 11.

⁸ Yücel Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Kısa Tarihi*. (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2004), 1.

⁹ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, 49.

¹⁰ Meyda Yeğenoğlu, "Peçeli Fanteziler: Oryantalist Söylemde Kültürel ve Cinsel Fark," *Oryantalizm, Hegemonya ve Kültürel Fark*, Ed. Fuat Keyman, Mahmut Mutman and Meyda Yeğenoğlu, İletişim, İstanbul 1996, 116.

¹¹ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

East. As cited in Parla, Said stated that Orientalism is synchronic and with European colonization and is an important institution that serves Western colonization efforts.¹² The Orientalist doctrine then bestowed upon the West knowledge of the *Other* or the Orient, which it needed in order to colonize the East. This would suggest that Orientalism served as an accomplice to modern colonization efforts.¹³ The remainder of this academic work analyzes the imperialistic policies that France pursued in order to dominate and assume control of Syria from the time of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt until the time during which Syria was freed from French rule. Further, this paper discusses the ways in which France's approach to Syria overlaps with Edward Said's opinions regarding Orientalism.

The Colonization Rivalry and the Invasion of Egypt

Between 10th and 13th centuries, Europe desired to take back Jerusalem, the sacred space that Europeans believed belonged to Christians, but it also desired to attain the wealth and prosperity Eastern societies were enjoying. Europeans were suffering immense poverty, and this motivated European countries to organize a series of Crusades (1095-1272) to the East. In order to encourage the European people to join in the Crusades, countries suggested that Islam as a destructive and offensive religion, and that Christians living under Muslims rule were oppressed.¹⁴ Europeans were led to believe that they were going east to save their Christian brethren from Muslim rule.¹⁵ These military expeditions, which prompted Christianity to become synonymous with Europe, were then purported to be carried out in the name of religion, when in fact, they were also carried out for economic purposes.¹⁶ These expeditions, which would contribute to the re-establishment of commerce between the Eastern Mediterranean region and Europe, not only enabled Europe to benefit from the East's prosperity, but they also played a significant role in allowing the Western world to gain a better understanding of Islamic society and civilization.¹⁷ After the Crusades, in fact, the French began to form close political, economic, cultural, and religious ties with Syria and Lebanon.¹⁸

However, as of the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire's ascendant political and military power had caused the the regions in the Middle East to fall, one by to, to the Ottoman Empire and its rule, which in turn prompted Europe to temporarily put on hold its plans regarding the Near East. As the Ottoman Empire expanded its borders via conquests, Europe was forced to enter into a diplomatic dialogue with the Muslim Ottoman government.¹⁹ This encouraged the first bilateral relations (i.e., Capitulations of the Ottoman Empire) between Suleiman the Magnificent and French ruler Francis I, which allowed for increased political and economic gains for France. For instance, in 1536, after the Ottoman Empire and France had both signed the capitulation agreement, France became the first European state to open a consulate and hold a permanent ambassadorship in the Empire.²⁰ Further, in 1604, privileges were granted to the French concerning the protectorate of the Catholics in the Ottoman Empire.²¹ In addition,

¹² Jale Parla, *Efendilik, Şakîyatçılık, Kölelik*. (İstanbul: İletişim, 1985), 10-11.

¹³ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 10.

¹⁴ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 38.

¹⁵ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 38.

¹⁶ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 31.

¹⁷ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 36.

¹⁸ Jan Karl Tanenbaum, "France and the Arab Middle East, 1914-1920," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 68:7 (1978): 5.

¹⁹ Maxime Rodinson, *İslâm'ın Mirası: Batıyı Büyüleyen İslâm*. (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 2003), p.37.

²⁰ Süleyman Kocabaş, *Paris'in "Doğu Yolu"nda Yaptıkları: Tarihte Türkler ve Fransızlar*, (İstanbul: Vatan Yayınları, 1990) 35.

²¹ Kocabaş, *Paris'in "Doğu Yolu"nda*, 57.

the French were granted the right to complete the railway projects they had planned, which would involve Syria and Lebanon.²²

The Ottoman Empire and the French were on good terms until the end of the 18th century, at which point the French Revolution has come to a close, and the French began making demands on the Ottoman Empire via its offensive and expansionist policy that resulted from the revolution.²³ Further, because the Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty Karlowitz in 1699 and the Treaty of Kuchuk Kaynarji in 1774, it began to retreat from Europe; this the Christian world to come to prominence and thus that shape the modern world while the Muslim world entered into a sort of recession.²⁴ In addition, because the Ottoman Empire no longer possessed its former political or military power, and because it had granted such capitulations to foreign countries such as France, European countries including Britain and France began to refocus their ambitions on the Near East come.

Britain and France became rivals in their pursuits of colonialism. France did not possess Britain's wealthy or expansive colonies, and this led the French to set their sights on the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire.²⁵ Egypt with its wealthy and resources, thanks to its geopolitical position, could permit France the opportunity to carry out commercial activities via the Red Sea as well as to construct military bases in the region, which could upend Britain's hegemony in India.²⁶ However, it was not enough that France saw the invasion as necessary; if the French were to dominate Egypt, they had to make the people of the Orient believe that this occupation was in their best interest. Since his childhood, Napoléon had found the East appealing, but even during the time he occupied Egypt in 1798, Napoléon had no experience regarding the East.²⁷ Napoléon had read Volney's book *Travels through Syria and Egypt, in the Years 1783, 1784, and 1785* in 1788, however, and this affected him such that he began to research Egypt to assess how easily it could be occupied.²⁸ Ultimately, because he tasked a number of scientists with chronically his military expedition, Napoléon's trek into Egypt was entirely of an Orientalist nature.²⁹

Upon invading Egypt in 1798, Napoléon published an Arabic leaflet in which he claimed that he was brother to the Muslims and the Caliph, and his goal was to save the Egyptian people from Mamluk oppression.³⁰ In the speech he gave at Alexandria, Napoléon called out, "We are true Muslims" (nous sommes les vrais Musulmans), and he claimed that his war efforts were for the sake Islam.³¹ According to the French point of view, the invasion of Egypt was not a military occupation, but rather it was a means of bring freedom to the Orient via the West. For this reason, Napoléon worked to convince the Egyptians that France was the true protector of Islam.³² How could Europe perceive Islam as a threat to the West and to

²² Tanenbaum, "France and the Arab," 5.

²³ Özgür Yılmaz- Aslı Şenol Ghebantani, "Fransız Diplomat Boislecomte'a Göre Mehmet Ali Paşa İsyanı Döneminde Osmanlı Ticareti (1833-1834)," *Tarihin Peşinde: Uluslararası Tarih ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 7:14 (2015): 439.

²⁴ Nathan C. Funk- Abdul Aziz Said. "Islam and the West: Narratives of Conflict and Conflict Transformation," *International Journal of Peace Studies* 9:1 (2004): 10.

²⁵ Ömer Osman Umar, "Suriye'de Fransız Emperyalizmi." *Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 12:1 (2002): 298.

²⁶ Matthew Smith Anderson, *Doğu Sorunu 1774-1923: Uluslararası İlişkiler Üzerine Bir İnceleme*. (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2010), 43.

²⁷ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, 90.

²⁸ Kocabaş, *Paris'in "Doğu Yolu"nda*, 129.

²⁹ Jale Parla, "Hayali Doğu: Oryantalizm" *Atlas* 96:3 (2001): 62.

³⁰ Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma*. (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2002), 121.

³¹ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, 92.

³² Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

Christianity, and then suddenly see itself as the true protector of Islam? While France was committed to rescuing the Egyptian people from Mamluk domination and claimed to be modernizing and enlightening the East, it also intended to tend to its imperial ambitions, which it kept concealed from the Egyptians so as to secure their support. As such, colonization efforts were not one-dimensional; that is, colonization efforts were supposedly aimed at both helping the Orient to realize progress and allowing the West, which saw itself as superior, to assume control over the East in order to realize imperialist agendas.³³

The Ottoman Emperor Selim III lacked the necessary means of communication that would have allowed him to follow along with Europe's intricate and rapidly changing diplomatic relations; as such, he was shocked at the invasion, given that he had been pursuing a policy meant to get him closer to the French.³⁴ Upon learning of the invasion, the Empire published a counter-leaflet that stated that the French were infidels denying Allah, and that they were imprisoning priests in their country and seeking to deceive the Egyptian people.³⁵ However, Ottoman Empire's initiatives were insufficient and failed to eject France from the region. In order to force France to retreat from Egypt, the Empire was obliged to cooperate with Britain, as Britain offered the only solution that would force France to withdraw from the region.³⁶ According to Edward Said, Napoléon's invasion of Egypt served as a turning point for both the West and the East since this military expedition took a step toward the hegemony of the West over the East.³⁷

French Missionary Schools

At the end of the 18th century, France had completed its nation-state building process, and in doing this, history no longer only shared stories of the successes of French rulers; now, it would speak of successes of the French nation as a whole.³⁸ In addition, after the Revolution, France was not content with seeing itself solely as the center of superior Western civilization; rather, it sought to spread the French language and culture to other regions.³⁹ At the end of the 18th century, the Orientalist doctrine, which, until the 18th century, was concerned primarily with learning about and gaining knowledge regarding *the Other*, tasked itself with civilizing the Other.⁴⁰ According to Kemal Karpat, this approach, which France referred to as "mission civilatrice," was merely a form of political and economic imperialism.⁴¹ The aim of the West was to incite the Eastern people against the Ottoman Empire by making Easterners aware of the despotic rule that had supposedly oppressed them for centuries; in other words, they sought to rescue the Orient from its so-called despot.

During the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire began to fall behind Europe in terms of both military and technology, and this prompted European states – primarily Britain and France – to hasten their actions regarding control over Arab territories. This became especially important during the 19th century when both Britain and France sought to protect their industrial operations and increase their respective levels of welfare.⁴² In order to do this, each

³³ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 117

³⁴ Berkes, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma*, 121.

³⁵ Berkes, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma*, 122.

³⁶ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 89-90

³⁷ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

³⁸ Kemal H. Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Ortadoğu'da Millet, Milliyet, Milliyetçilik*. (İstanbul: Timaş Tarih: 2011), 25.

³⁹ Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze*, p.25.

⁴⁰ Recep Boztemur, "Marx, Doğu Sorunu ve Oryantalizm," *Doğu Batı* 5:20 (2002): 136.

⁴¹ Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze*, 25.

⁴² Mustafa Öztürk, "Arap Ülkelerinde Osmanlı İdaresi." *History Studies Ortadoğu Özel Sayısı* (2010): 342.

country sought to take advantage of raw materials present in the Near East. Further, Europe saw the Near East as a new market in which it could sell its products.⁴³ European states suggested that the Easterners' good days were behind them, and only the West had the power to save them now that they were faced with existing in the modern world.⁴⁴ The French saw this as an opportunity to establish missionary schools in Syria and Beirut. The French were able to achieve this, as well as to further realize their imperial goals in the Near East, by taking advantage of Ottoman Empire's lack of governance and education in the region.⁴⁵

All subjects under Ottoman rule – both Muslims and non-Muslims – had existed under the *millet system* without experiencing any major problems. For instance, the Christian communities in the Empire were granted the freedom to manage their own religious affairs, and the non-Muslims encountered no problems regarding the practice of their religious rituals. However, they were less likely than their Muslim counterparts to be a part of upper military and administrative cadres, and they were obliged to pay additional taxes that the Muslims were not required to pay.⁴⁶ However, as the Empire began to lose its political, military, and economic power, the Christian communities began to distance or alienate themselves from Ottoman rule. This is what eventually allowed the Christian communities to be manipulated by imperial powers such as France. The French-built missionary schools established in Syria and Lebanon, then, initially seemed like a service being offered to the Arab society, but they were really being used to antagonize Arabs and instill feelings of hostility toward the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷ The Christian missionaries who taught at these schools told the non-Muslims that had been under the rule of the Empire that the Empire had destroyed their beliefs and had oppressed them.⁴⁸ Further, the missionaries suggested to the non-Muslims that it was only natural for them to disparage Islam and Muslims, and that it may be necessary to resort to force in order to secure their own independence and freedom.⁴⁹

Via its missionary schools in the region, France provided lectures in the Arab language and literature in addition to that which was characterized by Western culture; this is how France intended to raise an Arab generation who was familiar with both Western culture and its own culture.⁵⁰ It was no coincidence that Christian Arabs were the first to consider ideas regarding early Arab nationalism and were the people who were educated in these schools that offered a flawless Western education.

While France went about displaying French hospitality to Syria and Lebanon's Arab citizens via French missionaries and hospitals where Arab citizens could receive treatment, the country was also instilling Ottoman antagonism.⁵¹ As noted previously, France did not outwardly present its imperialist face via an offensive attitude; rather, it did so by offering a helping hand to the Arabs whom France claimed it wanted to rescue from so-called Ottoman domination.

⁴³ Öztürk, "Arap Ülkelerinde," 343.

⁴⁴ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, 44.

⁴⁵ Ömer Osman Umar, *Osmanlı Yönetimi ve Fransız Manda İdaresi Altında Suriye (1908-1938)*. (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2004), 24.

⁴⁶ Anderson, *Doğu Sorunu*, 19.

⁴⁷ Umar, *Osmanlı Yönetimi*, 27.

⁴⁸ Stanford J. Shaw, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Savaşına Giriş*. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2013), 24.

⁴⁹ Shaw, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı*, 24.

⁵⁰ H. Bayram Soy, "Arap Milliyetçiliği: Ortaya Çıkışından 1918'e Kadar," *Bilgi* 30 (2004): 176.

⁵¹ Umar, "Suriye'de Fransız," 299.

Via the concept of *Oriental Despotism*,⁵² which became widespread, especially in the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire was depicted as a state that governed over its subject via despotic rule, while Europe or the West was described as a moderate other, which was the opposite of the Eastern despot.⁵³ Books and newspapers written in the West during the 19th century also described the Ottoman Empire, especially the Turks, as ruling via oppressive means.⁵⁴ It was suggested that the Ottoman used force to control non-Muslims, which prompted non-Muslims to see themselves as the victims of Islamic rule.⁵⁵ The West sought to encourage non-Muslims to see themselves as a part of Western culture since they were on the Christians, as Europe stood to gain from getting the non-Muslims to accept that they had every right to benefit from Western civilization.⁵⁶ The European states' primary objective was to achieve legitimacy among Arab citizens so that they could carry out their imperialist agendas in the East.

In addition to the French missionary schools in Syria and Lebanon, the 19th century played witness to the West's military and technological superiority, and this too prompted students from the East to seek out European education. In particular, in order to benefit from French military and technological progress during the period of Egyptian Wâli Mehmet Alî Pasha and his son İbrahim Pasha, dozens of Eastern students from Egypt traveled to Europe to be educated. However, according to Said, those who traveled to the East to the West to learn about and benefit from knowledge associated with European culture sought something very different than those who traveled from the West to the East.⁵⁷ Those who traveled to the East were more inclined to learn the ways of Easterners – how they talked and behaved⁵⁸ – so as to use this information to realize European hegemony in the East.

While France sought to provide education and Western culture and ideas to those in the East via its missionary schools, and it sought to stimulate nationalist feelings in Arabs that would prompt them to break away from the Ottoman Empire, the French also declared themselves the protectorate of the Catholic Maronites in the Empire and attempted to increase French economic activity within the Empire. For instance, France had a vital role in Lebanon's silk industry. The flow of French capital into the region helped the silk industry in the Lebanon mountain region to develop such that, on average, one in three people in the region were employed.⁵⁹ Additionally, France also assumed economic influence in Syria thanks to the establishment of its railroads.⁶⁰

Further, as Edward Said stated, France's relationship with minorities was of great importance to French politics.⁶¹ The French who claimed that they were the protectors of Islam during Napoleon's invasion of Egypt were now claiming that they would help the communities suffering in Syria, and the communities they claimed were suffering were comprised of

⁵² The word *despot* which was first appeared in 1720 in a French dictionary, was a term that was used by Western intellectuals when referring to rulers who do not take their people's rights into consideration; while Eastern societies are depicted as static and closed to development, Western peoples were identified as dynamic and open to the development of societies (Boztemur, "Marx, Doğu Sorunu," 138-139).

⁵³ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 81.

⁵⁴ Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze*.

⁵⁵ Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze*.

⁵⁶ Karpat, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze*, 28.

⁵⁷ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, 216.

⁵⁸ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 30.

⁶⁰ William Shorrock, "The Origin of the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon: The Railroad Question, 1901-1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1:2 (1970): 135.

⁶¹ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

Christians.⁶² When civil conflicts in the Lebanon mountain region erupted, and Catholic Christians were subjected to massacres in both Lebanon and Damascus, France sent military units to the region, and upon holding a conference to resolve the matter of Lebanon's future, ensured that Lebanon would be recognized as a separate political unit (Mutasarrifiyyah), which would be governed by a Catholic Ottoman ruler.⁶³

As such, the European states presented themselves as the protectorates of minorities, which allowed them to plant the seeds that would ultimately lead to the colonization of the Orient, which was a long and slow process. The Orientalist insight, which came into existence via various texts and discussions about the East, over time, resulted in the West dominating the East via politics, economics, and military might.⁶⁴ All of the missionary facilities that the French built in the region served as pillars of France's imperialist-expansionist policy in the Ottoman Empire. Further, beneath France's political, economic, and educational investments in the region was the country's objective to dominate Syria and Lebanon.⁶⁵

The Road Leading to the Sharif Hussein Revolt

In the pre World War I period, European countries' colonization efforts increased and gathered speed, especially among states such as Britain, France, Germany, Holland, and Italy, whose colonization rivalries were intensified and whose disagreements regarding how regions would be divided led to war.⁶⁶ From this point forward, in order to both secure the Indian route and to maintain superiority in the Mediterranean, Britain, like France, claimed rights to the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire. Britain and France, as well as other European countries, were aware that Europe's "Sick Man" was in decline and was likely not long for the World; as such, the countries sought to divide up Ottoman territories, but they recognized the importance of dividing these territories at the right time and in ways that would serve their political, military and economic interests. However, Britain did not want to directly interfere with the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire; instead, the British sought out a suitable candidate. This suitable candidate turned out to be Sharif Hussein, Emir of Mecca. Because Sharif descended from the Prophet Muhammed and was a leader who had influence on the tribes in the Hejaz region, the British saw him as the most suitable candidate able to organize an Arab revolt against the Ottoman.⁶⁷

British High Commissioner Sir Henry McMahon negotiated with Sharif Hussein from July 1915 until February 1916;⁶⁸ he guaranteed Sharif the establishment of Arab state(s) in the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire in exchange for an Arab revolt that was to be organized in the Ottoman territories. However, the British had to take into consideration the interests of its ally France; thus, it had to consider how it would share the region, and it was not specific when negotiating with Sharif regarding which Arab state regions it would guarantee to him. As such, Sharif believed that the British would stand behind him at the end of the war, and since he had limited time to carry out his revolt against the Ottoman government, he was willing to organize the revolt immediately.⁶⁹ In June 1916, Sharif Hussein initiated the Arab Revolt

⁶² Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

⁶³ John P. Spagnolo, "French Influence in Syria Prior to World War I: The Functional Weakness of Imperialism," *Middle East Journal* 23:1 (1969): 50.

⁶⁴ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

⁶⁵ John P. Spagnolo, "The Definition of a Style of Imperialism: The Internal Politics of the French Educational Investment in Ottoman Beirut," *French Historical Studies* 8:4 (1974): 563-584

⁶⁶ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 123.

⁶⁷ Karol Sorby, "The Arab National Movement in World War I," *Asian and African Studies* 15:1 (2006): 42.

⁶⁸ Anderson, *Doğu Sorunu*.

⁶⁹ Peter Mansfield, *Osmanlı Sonrası Türkiye ve Arap Dünyası*. (İstanbul: Sander Yayınları, 1975), 57.

against the Ottoman Empire with the support of the British and French. In October 1918, when the military units under the command of Hussein's son Faisal took control of the whole of Syria except for the coastline, which was under French control, Hussein believed he had nearly achieved his goal. However, prior to the breakout of the World War I, France notified Britain that the French had close cultural, economic, and political ties with Syria and Lebanon, and thus had rights over these regions.⁷⁰ In the pre-war period, between 81 % and 83% of the internal debt and 59% of the external debt of the Ottoman Empire belonged to the French.⁷¹ As such, given France's national interests, it seemed unreasonable that the French would leave the Near East completely to the British. According to Said, during the pre-war period and after the war, European states held secret negotiations in order to establish mandate rule and decide how best to divide the Near East to suit their interests.⁷² The Sykes-Picot Agreement, signed by British Mark Sykes and French François Georges-Picot in April 1916, was kept secret as a part of this process.⁷³ Despite the post-Revolution Bolsheviks revealing the secret plans of Europe's imperialist states with regard to the Arab territories of the Ottoman, the British were able to convince Sharif Hussein that the territories they promise him would be his; this enabled Britain to again secure Hussein's trust.⁷⁴ Although the war ended and the parties came together at a peace conference in Paris in January 1919, disagreements between Britain and France emerged regarding the division of the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁵ Further, Emir Faisal, the son of Sharif Hussein, attended the conference as the Arab representative and demanded the recognition of the Arab national rights and insisted that the British keep the promises they had made.⁷⁶ In addition, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson declared that the societies freed from the Ottoman Empire had the right to self-determination; this instilled further hostility among the interested parties, and it served to undermine the investments the colonialist states made up to that point.⁷⁷ In order to address the conflict between Britain and France, and to assess the expectations of the local communities, the United States decided to send a commission called King-Crane to the region. The commission, which consisted of businessmen and a scientist, examined the Middle East and revealed that the Arab people wanted independence.⁷⁸ If this was not possible, then they wanted to be made into a state consisting of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. And if this was not possible, then they were willing to consent to U.S. or British mandate. They were, however, entirely opposed to French rule.⁷⁹ This did not resolve the tension that existed between Britain and France, however, as the British believed that they were responsible to the Arabs and Sharif Hussein, while the French held no such beliefs.⁸⁰ Eventually, at the San Remo Conference in April 1920, it was agreed that Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq would fall to British mandate, and Syria and Lebanon would fall to French mandate.

Edward Said stated that at the end of World War I, 85% of the world's territories had become colonized by Europe.⁸¹ In fact, the new system, which was referred to as the mandate

⁷⁰ Mansfield, *Osmanlı Sonrası*, 53.

⁷¹ Edmund Burke, "A Comparative View of French Native Policy in Morocco and Syria, 1912-1925," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9:2 (1973): 176.

⁷² Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, 232.

⁷³ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

⁷⁴ Ömer Faruk Abdullah, *Suriye Dosyası*, (İstanbul: Akabe Yayınları, 1985), 34.

⁷⁵ Shaw, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı*, 393.

⁷⁶ Shaw, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı*.

⁷⁷ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, 233.

⁷⁸ Oral Sander, *Siyasi Tarih-2.Cilt (1918-1994)*. (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2000).

⁷⁹ Sander, *Siyasi Tarih*, 76.

⁸⁰ Mansfield, *Osmanlı Sonrası*, 71.

⁸¹ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

regime, was merely a new version of imperialism.⁸² Since the 18th century, France which had made several investments in Syria and Lebanon in order to realize its imperial goals, and together with Britain, the country encouraged Sharif Hussein to incite a revolt against the crumbling Ottoman Empire as a means of further achieving both countries imperialist objectives. Further, France had achieved victory in its long-running project regarding Syria and Lebanon, and it could not now begin to listen to the voices calling for independence. According to Said, Easterners had begun to enter into the West's orbit of rule, and the first rule of the system was not to allow any Easterner to gain independence and govern itself.⁸³ As such, France persevered in its efforts to prevent any emergence of revolt in Syria or Lebanon, thereby further tending to its imperial interests.

A Glimpse into the French Mandate Period in Syria

In 1922, per Article 22 of the United Nations Covenant, and as a result of the United Nation's recognition of French control of Syria and Lebanon, France assumed certain international responsibilities to the societies under its control. For instance, the mandate state had the responsibility of positioning the states under its control such that they would eventually be able to stand on their own. Further, the mandate state had to take into consideration the rights and interests of the state under its control and investment in the state so as to modernize it. France was then not to act on behalf of its own interests.

When France took over the mandate regime in Syria and Lebanon, the country made it clear that it would rule over Syria if Syria was unwilling to compromise with France.⁸⁴ French General Henri Gouraud, who was appointed to Syria as a High Commissioner, gave a speech to the people of Lebanon in August 1920 in which he thanked the Lebanese for their loyalty and stated that those who had obeyed the colonial rule would be rewarded and those who did not obey would be punished.⁸⁵ Further, in his speech, Gouraud depicted France as a protective mother, himself a father, and Syria and Lebanon as the children in this relationship.⁸⁶

As soon as the French began to rule in Syria, the French took certain precautions in effort to prevent a unified Arab nationalist movement that might threaten France's position in Syria, Lebanon, and North Africa. Thus was born France's divide-and-rule policies, which would serve to underscore the ethnic, cultural, and regional differences among the people of Syria. Via these policies, Greater Syria was divided into six regions, which included the Great Lebanon state in Lebanon, the Alawite state in the Latakia region, the Druze state in the Jabal al-Druze region, the Damascus and Aleppo-centered Damascus and Aleppo states, and the Sanjak of Alexandretta. By dividing Syria into six autonomous regions, the French sought to place emphasis on the ethnic, sectarian, and regional differences among the Arabs, thereby preventing the formation of a unified Arab nationalist movement. France recognized that if the Arabs joined together they could effectively expel France from the region and emancipate Syria.

By the end of the first World War, France, as well as other European states, had incurred serious economic and human losses.⁸⁷ In addition, the war had suggested to European states that Europe as a whole was no longer the unstoppable force it has once been. The war and the

⁸² James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸³ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

⁸⁴ Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 39.

⁸⁵ Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 39.

⁸⁶ Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 39.

⁸⁷ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 131.

damage it caused had shaken France's confidence,⁸⁸ and this affected how France viewed its national and regional interests, as well as how it implemented policies in Syria. For example, France's economic interests pushed the country to assume control over Syria.⁸⁹ The French had made considerable investments in Syria that remained from the Ottoman period. The country also held investments in the silk and tobacco industries, and had French had constructed the Beirut port, the Beirut-Aleppo railway, and the route that connected Aleppo to Damascus.⁹⁰ France expected that Syria, as well as the French colonies, would replace the human power that the colonizer had lost during the war, provide raw materials to France's shaken industrial efforts, and serve as a market for French products.⁹¹ To this end, France had, for example, positioned the French franc at the center of the Syrian economy, which effectively allowed French bankers to assume control of the monetary system in Syria.⁹² This permitted the Syrian economy to develop economic tied to the West and French capitalists.⁹³ This French monetary policy, however, harmed the Syrian economy.⁹⁴ For example, devaluations of the French franc during the mandate period not only hit those who were engaged in commerce and marketing in Syria, but it also caused some business owners to go bankrupt when they were no longer able to make their loan payments on time.⁹⁵ In addition, France allocated Syria's coveted fertile lands to wealthy land owners and held that the Europeans had the right to decide what projects would be approved with regard to the construction of roads, railways, electrification, and telegraph installations.⁹⁶ Further, in 1924, France had turned management of the Syrian part of the Hejaz railway over to a French company; this is noteworthy because the railway was important to Muslims, as it served as the pilgrimage route and had operated freely without the supervision of any foreign company.⁹⁷ While it was not the only catalyst, this served to grow feelings of discontent among Syrians with regard to French rule over the region.⁹⁸ Additionally, the High Commission would, from time to time, prevent Syria from importing grain under the pretext that a given year's harvest was insufficient; the decrease in grain prices of grain would then allow French agents to buy grain for cheap.⁹⁹ Businesses in Syria also suffered from not being able to compete with foreign businesses, and this was felt strongest when France increased its demand for European goods in Syria by implementing low customs duties on the European goods.¹⁰⁰

While in control of Syria, France did little to narrow the gap that existed between Syria's wealthy, urban Muslims and the middle and peasants classes who comprised 70% of Syria's population.¹⁰¹ In the early years of the mandate, even though France had attempted to ameliorate the conditions of the peasants by maintaining land records, establishing an agricultural credit bank, parcelling out community-owned land, and selling off lands that

⁸⁸ Rodinson, *İslâm'ın Mirası*, 75.

⁸⁹ Mehmet Akif Okur, "Emperyalizmin Ortadoğu Tecrübesinden Bir Kesit: Suriye'de Fransız Mandası," *Bilig* 48 (2009): 143.

⁹⁰ Okur, "Emperyalizmin Ortadoğu", 143.

⁹¹ Tanenbaum, "France and the Arab," 42.

⁹² Okur, "Emperyalizmin Ortadoğu Tecrübesinden," 142.

⁹³ Abdullah, *Suriye Dosyası*, 38.

⁹⁴ Philip Shukry Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 393.

⁹⁵ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 393.

⁹⁶ Abdullah, *Suriye Dosyası*, 38.

⁹⁷ David Kenneth Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East 1914-1958*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 261.

⁹⁸ Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism*, 261.

⁹⁹ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 91.

¹⁰⁰ Umar, *Osmanlı Yönetimi*, 463.

¹⁰¹ Moshe Maoz, *Esad: Şam'ın Sfenski*. (İstanbul: Akademi Yayınları, 1991).

belonged to the national treasury at fair prices, the peasants neither had the financial power to purchase land nor creditworthiness that would enable them to secure credit.¹⁰² As such, only the wealthy were able to purchase the available lands.¹⁰³ France also did little to tend to the interests of the poor in Syria when making investments in the region. Because France initially saw the mandate regime as temporary, it avoided making long-term investments in Syria.¹⁰⁴

With regard to education in Syria, France pursued policies aimed at placing emphasis on ethnic and religious differences. For example, while France increase the fundings of Catholic schools that would serve French interests, it reduced funding for state schools, which prompted the closing of some state schools. This measure was meant to prevent the state schools from instilling in young Syrian students a collective national consciousness that could ultimately lead to a population set on independence.¹⁰⁵ Further, French was declared an official language in Syria, and studies pertinent to Arab culture were sidelined to make room for an education model that focused on French history and literature.¹⁰⁶ Students attending Syrian schools were also forced to sing the French national anthem and salute the French flag.^{107 108}

The cultural and economic gap that existed between Christians and Muslims in Syria further widened when Christians who had been educated in French schools had become preferred to Muslims in state affairs.¹⁰⁹ Throughout the mandate period, thanks to the French protectorate, Christians in Syria had been able to protect their commercial and financial dominance and were in the position to maintain their financial activities.¹¹⁰ The French sought to coax the Christians to their side by playing on their historical fears by stating that the Muslims could persecute them if they left.¹¹¹ By pursuing these policies in Syria and Lebanon, and by seeking to keep the Christian minority on their sides, the French attempted to keep the Christian and the Muslim Syrians from coming together to form an Arab nationalist movement that could stand against French rule. To the French, Syrian Christians seemed eager to benefit from Europe's knowledge and experience, while the rest of society (i.e., Muslim Arabs) was comprised of narrow-minded and fanatical individuals.¹¹² This view, which held that Christians were able to understand the civilizing mission of the French (due to their open-mindedness) and had the capacity to provide the necessary support, while Muslim Arabs in Syria were *the backward others* lacking the capacity to understand this sublime goal, is suggestive of Orientalist thought. However, the *minority policy* that France pursued in Syria by developing the Christians at the expense of Muslim majority was not the modernizing and enlightening mission of the Orient; rather it was France's means of securing a collaborator that would facilitate the country's ability to achieve its imperial goals in the region.

Once Syria was under mandate rule, France had arrested several nationalists who resisted the mandate regime; these individuals were either imprisoned or sent into exile. As a result, in the early 1920s, the majority of the Syrian nationalists' independence movements had been organized by individuals in exile, as these individuals knew that if they attempted to organize

¹⁰² Maoz, *Esad*, 38-39.

¹⁰³ Maoz, *Esad*, 39.

¹⁰⁴ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 63.

¹⁰⁵ Umar, "Suriye'de Fransız," 303.

¹⁰⁶ Abdullah, *Suriye Dosyası*, 36.

¹⁰⁷ Abdullah, *Suriye Dosyası*, 369.

¹⁰⁸ Umar, "Suriye'de Fransız," 303.

¹⁰⁹ Maoz, *Esad*, 37.

¹¹⁰ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 362.

¹¹¹ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 362.

¹¹² Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*.

the same movements in Syria, they could face arrest or imprisonment.¹¹³ While in Syria, French advisors had not taken any steps to provide Syrian bureaucrats with experience or knowledge regarding state government; instead, the French preferred to rule the Syrians themselves.¹¹⁴ Further, the French High Commissioner who oversaw the ruling of Syria and Lebanon was responsible to the government in Paris, but he was not obliged or inclined to consult with any Syrian body regarding the future of.¹¹⁵ And though there were Syrians tasked with state affairs in the cities, they were always accompanied by French officers.¹¹⁶ Further, the Syrians who were positioned such that they handled state affairs were nearly always the Maronites that the French considered smart and open-minded; it was rare that the French relied on Muslim Arab officers to conduct state business.¹¹⁷ As such, the French treated Syria as a colony in that the French, rather than the Syrians, were the only ones granted the capacity to approve any political moves or decisions that would affect Syria.¹¹⁸

During the 1920s, especially, the French mandate regime in Syria had persevered thanks to French military superiority rather than the consent of the Syrian people and the reconciliation with the mandate rule.¹¹⁹ In particular, France's security forces and spies served as the primary vehicles by which France maintained its existence in the region. By 1930, France had approximately 30,000 military units, 3,500 policeman, and hundreds of secret service agents dispersed throughout the Syrian population.¹²⁰ These forces were employed to quiet any anti-French activities or movements.

Although France had obtained the right to rule *the Orient*, which the country had sought to dominate for centuries, the task (i.e., *the Occident* exerting dominance over *the Orient*) did not seem like an easy one. Occupying a piece of land was not enough to allow a country to maintain its existence there; the occupying country had to permeate the culture and the people of that land.¹²¹ As such, the French should have obtained new knowledge about the society and culture of the region it sought to dominate. This is one reason why France was unsuccessful in its attempts to control Syria for a longer period; the French knew too little about Syria, and what it did know was not rooted in reality.¹²² For example, between 1919 and 1920, it was clear that France had no real knowledge regarding the social settlement of Syria; only those who possessed colonial desires in the region claimed that the Syrian people would be pleased with a French presence in Syria.¹²³ According to Said, even during the first World War, the French had less influence in the Near East than the British.¹²⁴ Philip Khoury stated that even during the two decades during which France ruled Syria, French knowledge of the region was slight, and only after the 1930s did the country seek to conduct in-depth research regarding the region.¹²⁵ When French entered Syria and sought to control the Syrians, they expected to encounter people who would compromise with them; however, what they encountered was as

¹¹³ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 219.

¹¹⁴ Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, p.66.

¹¹⁵ Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism*, p.258.

¹¹⁶ Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism*.

¹¹⁷ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 71.

¹¹⁸ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 259.

¹¹⁹ Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism*, 261.

¹²⁰ Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 49.

¹²¹ Bulut, *Oryantalizmin Tarihi*, 123.

¹²² Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 65.

¹²³ Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism*.

¹²⁴ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

¹²⁵ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*.

society that proved to be ideologically sophisticated, politically well-organized, and resistant to French control.¹²⁶

In addition to France's lack of knowledge and experience regarding the region, the economic, political, and cultural policies that France tried to implement in Syria served only to aggravate the discontent that the majority of Syrians felt toward the French mandate. Even before the mandate, the Syrians were resistant to the idea that the French would rule them, and this played a role in the outbreak of the anti-French revolts in Syria. The Ibrahim Hananu, Shaikh Salih' Ali, and Hama ve Damascus revolts were some of the anti-French revolts that emerged during the mandate;¹²⁷ among these, there was one very important revolt, which was a revolt initiated by Durzi shaikh Sultan-al-Atrash in al-Suwayda in 1925. This was revolt, which was shaped by nationalist feelings, had begun in an isolated and remote region before spreading to the other regions of Syria, including Damascus. The revolt strengthened because it was able to secure support from people associated with different occupations.¹²⁸ In his book *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, Michael Provence discusses how the Syrian citizens who lived in both the countryside and the urban regions collaborated in order to expel the French from Syria.¹²⁹ While France believed that it could prevent the emergence of a unified Arab nationalist movement by separating Syrians according to their ethnic, religious, and regional demographics via the French divide-and-rule policy, the country overlooked the socioeconomic and cultural relationships that existed between the different groups in Syria¹³⁰ and the likelihood that they would join together to form a movement against their occupier. France believed that the Arab nationalist movement was a form of Muslim fanaticism aimed at preventing Western progress to civilize the East.¹³¹ Throughout their stay in Syria, the French built roads and bridges;¹³² however, when the aforementioned revolt occurred, the French rulers claimed that it was the result of the peasants being incapable of understanding the reforms and the self-interested nature of the feudal sheikhs who chose not to support the reforms.¹³³ Further, while the French presented themselves as the innocent leaders of the civilization, they depicted those who rebelled against them as ungrateful, wild, and inconsiderate Easterners.¹³⁴ France's racist, orientalist, and essentialist point of view that the country expressed in response to the revolt served as justification the country needed to continue pursuing its imperialist efforts in Syria.¹³⁵ If France had been convinced that the revolt was anti-imperialist, then French desires for colonization might never be fully satisfied.¹³⁶ According to Edward Said, people of the Orient were thought of or represented in specific ways (e.g., wild, backward) so that the West could satisfy its interests regarding history, intellect, economics, etc.¹³⁷ For example, France represented the non-Christian Syrians as backwards people because this enabled the French to continue working on behalf of their own imperial interests. Here, according to the French, the Easterners were backward and

¹²⁶ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 72.

¹²⁷ N.E. Bou-Nacklie, "Tumult in Syria's Hama in 1925: The Failure of a Revolt," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33:2 (1998): 273.

¹²⁸ Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

¹²⁹ Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

¹³⁰ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*.

¹³¹ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 48.

¹³² Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 65.

¹³³ Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 52.

¹³⁴ Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

¹³⁵ Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

¹³⁶ Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

¹³⁷ Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*, 285.

barbaric, far from becoming a nation on their own, and yet they refused the modernization the French offered. This view allowed France justification to punish the individuals in the Orient – in this case, the Syrians – who did not obey French rule, and that is exactly what France did. For instance, when the revolt broke out, France spent two days bombing Aleppo from both the air and land.¹³⁸ The center of the city was seriously damaged, and several civilians lost their lives. In addition, French mandate authorities had chosen means of collective punishment of Syrian society, and wholesale executions, demolition of houses, and population transfers served as the primary means of punishment.¹³⁹ Further, arrests, imprisonment, the martial law had become an ordinary part of daily life during the mandate period in Syria, and thus was the offensive face of French imperialism to the Easterner.

The Withdrawal of France from Syria

The outbreak of civil war in Spain, as well as Italy's presence in Mediterranean, forced France to begrudgingly enter into an agreement with Syrian nationalists.¹⁴⁰ On September 9th, 1936, France and Syrian nationalists signed the French-Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. Per this Agreement, France would support Syria's membership to the League of Nations and reunite the Alawite and Druze states with the Syrian state, which France had separated with its divide-and-rule policies. In return, Syria would allow France to maintain military bases in Syria.¹⁴¹ France offered such concessions, however, only because it underestimated the power of the Arab nationalist movement in Syria.¹⁴² As such, with this agreement, France hoped to lessen the demands of the Syrian nationalists while still not recognizing Syria as a fully independent state.

However, the outbreak of the second World War presented the Syrian nationalists with the opportunity to pressure Europe into recognizing Syria's full independence.¹⁴³ In particular, the ascending British presence in Syria and the increasing British intervention regarding Syria's political and economic life during the war served to aggravate the Anglo-French rivalry, which in turn prompted the Syrian nationalists to renew their demands for independence.¹⁴⁴ Although Britain had been pressuring France to withdraw from Syria, even before the 1943 elections, France demanded to pursue control of significant institutions and military units, such as Troupes Speciales, and to get Syrian nationalists to accept France's demands.¹⁴⁵ However, in July 1943, Syrian nationalists, who were against the France's proposals, realized victory during elections in Syria.¹⁴⁶ Beginning in July 1944, the Soviet Union recognized Syria's full independence; soon thereafter, the United States and Britain also recognized Syria as an independent state.¹⁴⁷ This put added pressure on France to withdraw completely from Syria. However, as both Chamberlain and the well-known Scottish economist Adam Smith have stated, even if it did not provide any financial benefit, the colonizer state was not inclined to abdicate from its colony, as colonialization meant prestige for the colonizer.¹⁴⁸ French statesman Charles de Gaulle and his team, however, assessed Britain's insistence that France withdrawal from the region and understood this was a means by which

¹³⁸ William L. Cleveland, *Batı'ya Karşı İslam: Şekip Arslan'ın Mücadelesi*. (İstanbul: Ekin Yayınları, 2017),103.

¹³⁹ Provençe, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

¹⁴⁰ Umar, *Osmanlı Yönetimi*, 503.

¹⁴¹ Umar, *Osmanlı Yönetimi*, 503.

¹⁴² Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism*.

¹⁴³ Umar, *Osmanlı Yönetimi*, 509.

¹⁴⁴ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 583.

¹⁴⁵ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 613.

¹⁴⁶ Mansfield, *Osmanlı Sonrası*, 120.

¹⁴⁷ Okur, "Emperyalizmin Ortadoğu Tecrübesinden," 151.

¹⁴⁸ Muriel Evelyn Chamberlain, *Sömürgeciliğin Çöküşü (Dekolonizasyon)*. (İstanbul: Rehber, 1993), 12.

the British would move closer to achieving their own imperial goals in the region, which would be easier if France no longer had a presence in Syria.¹⁴⁹

On May 29th, 1945, when the French stated that they would not withdraw from Syria, turmoil erupted in Syria and Beirut that lasted for three weeks; France responded by sending military units to Aleppo, bombing the city and parliament, and causing the death of between 400 and 700 Syrian citizens.¹⁵⁰ Britain, with the support of the U.S., gave France an ultimatum that called for France to cease fire and withdraw its troops. Upon realizing that there were no feasible maneuvers left, France withdrew the last of its military units in April 1946, and it agreed to recognize Syria as a fully independent state. Some French negotiators continued to try to influence the region, but this was recognized as continued French imperialism, which the U.S., the Arab League, and the United Nations put to rest.¹⁵¹

Discussion

In sum, this study examined the political, military, economic, and cultural enterprises France embarked upon in order to take Syria and Lebanon under French control; the policies France employed to essentially shape Syria; and the overlap between Edward Said's thoughts regarding Orientalism and France's approach to Syrian society. The confrontation between the Occident and the Orient, which had begun with the Crusades, enabled France to eventually invade Egypt and carry out a Western mission to colonize the Near East. Further, by the end of the 18th century, when the Ottoman Empire had begun to lose some of its political and military power, France was primed to enforce its imperialist policies in Syria and Lebanon.

Initially, in order to pit the Arabs against the Ottoman, France took advantage of the Ottoman Empire's lack of supervision over the region, and opened missionary schools. Later, after developing economic relations with the Catholic Maronites of Syria and Lebanon, France claimed that it was their protectorate. This enabled France to maintain a political, economic, and cultural presence in the region, and this in turn laid the foundation for future Western hegemony. This coincides with Edward Said's finding that the European states' colonization of the East, which began via written texts and discourses, was permitted through the relationships Europeans forged with Christian minorities in the East.¹⁵²

Especially during the 19th century, imperialist states – primarily Britain and France – sought to protect their national and regional interests, and to obtain new colonies, which prompted them to fix their eyes on the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire and to begin negotiations regarding the division of these territories prior to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This plan to colonize the Near East was effectively executed thanks to the 1920 San Remo Conference, which allowed the British to rule via mandate regime Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq, as well as it granted control of Syria and Lebanon to France.

During the mandate regime period, France claimed to assume responsibility for pushing Syria to become an independent state that could stand on its own; however, the policies the French pursued contradicted many of the provisions of the mandate regime. For instance, when France began its rule in Syria and Lebanon, the European country claimed that the region's people did not have the ability to make their own decisions or to represent themselves on the world's stage, which meant that France was tasked with tending to the state as a parent tends to

¹⁴⁹ Martin Thomas, "Divisive Decolonization: The Anglo-French Withdrawal from Syria and Lebanon, 1944–46," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 28:3 (2000): 72.

¹⁵⁰ Thomas, "Divisive Decolonization," 81.

¹⁵¹ Thomas, "Divisive Decolonization," 89.

¹⁵² Said, *Şarkiyatçılık*.

a child. However, France also sought to display itself as a moderate other who depicted the Ottoman Empire as an Oriental Despot and who would benefit Arab society, but as soon as France assumed control in Syria and Lebanon, the French made it clear that anyone who did not comply with the mandate rule would be punished. To this end, France established and put to use a security and intelligence network, and the country began to reveal its imperialist-offensive side. Since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, France had suggested to the people of the East that its aim was merely to civilize them, but ultimately, France's imperialist desires became apparent.

In addition, France had sought to develop Syria per the colonial ambitions of the French. This was to be done via education-based policies and policies intended to divide and rule the Syrian people based on regional, ethnic, and religious demographics, as these policies would prevent Syria from achieving full independence. These education-based and divide-and-rule policies would also help to ensure that an Arab nationalist movement would not occur in Syria and that Arab youth would not grow with nationalist inclinations, as this would surely undermine France's interests in North Africa, Syria, and Lebanon. Further, France implemented economic policies in Syria that overlapped with the financial interests of the French, and from time to time, these economic policies caused some Syrian citizens to experience great financial losses. During the mandate period, France's political efforts in Syria did nothing to ensure that an independent Syria would have an established political institution or statesmen capable of helping the Syrian people realize any great vision for the country. This played a role in Syria's later political instability, which would result in several military coups.

Although the French invested in infrastructure in Syria, these nominal investments were on par with France's mandated responsibilities, and they did little to modernize Syria or prepare the country to stand on its own. Although France had looked upon the mandate regime as a means of temporary rule, it was unclear how long the mandate period would last, as this would be determined by the political, economic and cultural reforms France would carry out while in Syria. However, France, resistant to withdraw from Syria, ruled the country for 26 years and took no real steps to facilitate Syria's independence.

The West's Orientalist approach, which had drawn a boundary between the West and East and was rooted in assumptions that were rooted in a distorted reality, played a role in France's outlook regarding Syria during both the pre-mandate period and the period of mandate rule. During the pre-mandate period, the French opened missionary schools and developed close economic ties with the Catholic Christians in order to encourage them to join with France; however, as a means of trying to indoctrinate Christians against the Empire, France also claimed that the Ottoman Empire and Muslims had supposedly damaged the Christians' beliefs. Said suggested as much when he stated that Orientalist discourse and colonizing discourse were intertwined, and France embodied this sentiment. France maintained these relationships with the Catholic Maronites throughout the mandate period, and in doing this, France depicted Christians as modern, open-minded, and intelligent, while identifying Muslim Arabs as backward, narrow-minded, and fanatic.

However, the assumptions the French made regarding Easterners were shaken when France encountered an ideologically sophisticated and politically well-organized society in Syria. In addition, France's unfamiliarity with Syrian society and the country's lack of knowledge and experience regarding the region served as a considerable handicap for France in Syria. For instance, some of the French who went to Syria with desires for colonization believed that Syrian society would welcome them, and they were disappointed when they encountered a society that resisted France's presence in Syria. Prior to arriving at Syria, the

French – in accordance with Orientalist thinking – believed that Easterners were without the ability to express themselves and therefore without the ability to resist, and it was these notions that suggested to the French that Syria would quietly go along with France's ideas about how to govern the Syrian people. However, the image of the Orient that the French encountered in Syria was far different from the image of the Orient that has been depicted and textualized in the West for centuries.

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