



**Prisoners Of War In Turkey During WWI:  
The Story Of Indians Captured At *Kut Al-'Amara***

**Birinci Cihan Harbinde Türkiyedeki Savaş Esirleri: Kut'ül Amare'de Ele  
Geçirilen Hintlilerin Hikayesi**

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**Anahtar Kelimeler (Türkçe)**

- 1) General Townshend
- 2) Bengalli Askerler
- 3) Halil Paşa
- 4) Kut'ül Amare
- 5) Kolonyalizm

**Anahtar Kelimeler (İngilizce)**

- 1) General Townshend
- 2) Bengali Soldiers
- 3) Halil Pasha
- 4) Kut al-'Amara
- 5) Colonialism

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 1914, WWI broke out and lasted for four years. It had an impact on most of the population of the world in one way or another. It had a wide range of consequences from the downfalls of old monarchies to the births of new nation-states. Above all else, the most important thing that I would like to highlight is that this war incorporated people who had no commonality with the interests of the ones who started the war into its structure. Thus, this study aims to analyze and talk about the story of Indian people who joined the British army under the head of General Townshend. The main purpose of the Indian units was to contribute to the main force to capture Baghdad, which they had no interest there and knew almost nothing about. I conducted my research mostly in the light of their experiences as POWs in the Mesopotamian world.

**Keywords:** *General Townshend, Bengal Ambulance Corps (BAC), Halil Pasha, Indian Prisoners of War, Bengali Soldiers, Mesopotamian Front 1915-1916, Kut al-‘Amara, Colonialism.*

## ÖZET

Birinci Cihan Harbi 1914 yılında patlak verdi ve dört yıl sürdü. Bu savaş dünya nüfusunun büyük çoğunluğunu şu yahut bu şekilde etkiledi. Savaşın eskimiş monarşilerin yıkılmasından yeni ulus-devletlerin kurulmasına değin geniş yelpazede sonuçları oldu. Her şeyin ötesinde, altını çizmek istediğim en önemli husus ise şudur ki; bu savaş, savaşı başlatanların çıkarları ve menfaatleri ile hiçbir paralellik göstermeyen insanları da içine almıştı. Bu çalışmanın amacı da tam da bu grup içinde sayabileceğimiz General Townshend komutasındaki İngiliz ordusunda yer alan Hintli askerlerin hikayesini anlatmak ve analiz etmektir. Hintli birliklerin temel amacı hiç de ilgilerinin bulunmadığı ve hakkında neredeyse hiçbir şey bilmedikleri Bağdat'ı İngiliz gücünün ele geçirmesine destek olmaktı. Çalışmamı ekseriyetle bu askerlerin Mezopotamya coğrafyasında savaş esiri olarak yaşadıkları deneyimler ışığında yürüttüm.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *General Townshend, Bengal Ambulans Ünitesi (BAÜ), Halil Paşa, Hintli Savaş Esirleri, Bengalli Askerler, Mezopotamya Cephesi 1915-1916, Kut'ül Amare, Kolonyalizm.*

## INTRODUCTION

On 28 June 1914 a Serbian nationalist killed Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo and this has initiated a political skirmish that later continued on the battlefields. When the First World War had started in August 1914, very few people would have thought that it would persist for more than four years. Moreover, nobody would ever imagine that the war was going to affect the livelihoods poor shepherd boys of Anatolia or destitute Bengali lads in Calcutta who was trying to make ends meet and secure a decent or respectable position in colonial India under the British rule.

Nearly two months after the assassination, World War I began. On the one side, Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Romania, Japan, and the United States sealed an alliance called the Allied Powers. On the other side, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire formed an alliance called the Central Powers. The Allied Powers were the ones who proclaimed the victory in November 1918. War casualties were over 16 million people, soldiers and civilians included. As it was recalled later as General War (*Harb-ı Umumî* in Turkish), its effects and the consequences were felt nearly every corner of the world. Probably the first time in the history of humankind the armed conflict had touched upon the lives of individuals living in remote parts of the world like East Africa or India and probably had no connection or affinity whatsoever with the leading combatant states.

The main purpose of this study is to cast light on the lives and the experiences of the people who had no commonality with the ones who initiated the war. Among whom, the targeted group was the Indian/Bengali sepoys who were deployed at the Mesopotamian front. Influenced by the colonial inequalities in their country, Bengali Indians volunteered to participate into the war to gain a respectable status in their society and become an agent in determining their destiny.

This research is inspired by the study of novelist Amitav Ghosh's fiction on the lives of these Hindus in the WWI. This modest study aims to illustrate the

particular approach which had colonialist overtones towards those Indian soldiers both by the British officers of Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force and the Pashas of the Imperial Ottoman Army, 6th Army Corps. We know that the history of the British colonial rule in India went on for decades and the colonized local population experienced a certain degree of social alienation on their land. The Ottoman ruling elite, on the other hand, carried out certain colonial policies to some extent in its Arab provinces as a kind of survival strategy in the last decades of the 19th century. The young Bengali men who took this war as a golden opportunity for social mobility and volunteered to join the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force were treated despondently during the war. The harsh colonial mentality of their officers during the campaign did not end when the British decided to surrender to the Ottoman Army at Kut-al Amara in April 1916. This time the Ottomans treated Bengali men during their captivity with a kind of colonial attitude as if it was borrowed from the British officers. The harsh climatic conditions of the desert and cold Anatolian plain accompanied by the borrowed colonial attitude of Ottoman officers from their adversaries made the life of Indian prisoners of war miserable. This modest study is a minor contribution in order to understand their pain and suffering nearly after a century.

In order to understand the experience of these Bengalis in Mesopotamian front, it is necessary to reckon with both the mentality of the British side that incorporated them into the war and the Ottoman side that welcomed them in the region. It does not require a huge effort to find academic works on British colonialism on India, we can cite the names of Chakrabarty and Spivak at once. Nevertheless, it is not an easy to find studies on the Indian POWs in the Mesopotamian front. In this light, this study grounds mostly on the works given by Amitav Ghosh, Nicolas Gardner, Leila Fawaz, Eugene Rogan, and Vedica Kant. In the light of the letters left by two Indian sepoy in the Bengal Ambulance Corps (BAC) named Captain Kalyan Mukherji and Sisir Sarbadhikari. I am grateful to the novelist Amitav Ghosh who brought light to the pain and the sufferings of Indian POWs in Mesopotamia. Under his guidance, Vedica Kant examined meticulously

the overall story of the sepoys in the front. In this framework, Gardner, Fawaz, and Rogan cast light on the Anglo-Indian army in the Iraq region.

On the other side, there are hundreds of articles, books, and thesis on the Ottoman modernization and civilization process; whereas not so much so that on the Ottoman colonial mind-set towards the Arabs and Indians on Mesopotamian front. Selim Deringil and Ussama Makdisi scrutinize this as a colonial attitude over the remote provinces, especially in the Arab geography. Deringil classifies this Ottoman attitude towards the people in the periphery as a kind of *borrowed colonialism*.<sup>1</sup> Besides, Emrecaan Dağlıoğlu adds another dimension to the debate by discussing the violence implemented in the Arab lands.

Separately, both British colonialism and the Ottoman version of colonial attitudes had already been investigated in academic works. Nevertheless, the extension of the colonial mentality on the lives of Bengalis in the Mesopotamian front has never been part of the debate in academic research. In the light of these works, this study tries to combine these colonial strategies in the same domain in order to understand the lives of the Indians during the war and in captivity.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on two key terms i.e., "emancipation" and "total mobilization". Throughout "emancipation" and "total mobilization" processes, these two key concepts, I argue shaped the lives and gave meaning to the Bengalis in order to be agent again of their destiny. Under the British colonial role, the Indians volunteered to participate into the WWI and tried to prove the ruling colonial power to show their capacities in war conditions. This mobilization, they hoped to bring them a kind of emancipation. Sisir Sarbadhikari who was one of the Indian sepoys joined the Bengal Ambulance Corps (BAC) and went to the Mesopotamian front sheds light on this mentality in the letter he wrote during the war that: "At this time Bengali leaders decided that this was a golden opportunity to establish a foothold in the armed services."<sup>2</sup> Then, the British Raj did not perceive the Indians, especially Bengalis, as a reliable fighting human stock. Within this kind of ruling mental and ideological framework, Indians saw this war

as a *golden opportunity* to gain their freedom and human dignity by participating into the war.

This study has three main chapters. In the first one, the overall military history of the Mesopotamian front is summarized in an operational sense. The British had received an unexpected defeat at Gallipoli in the hands of a so-called oriental power, the Ottoman Army. As the ruling colonial power of the time, the British tried to compensate for this unacceptable defeat. To raise its shaken prestige, the British government turned its face to Mesopotamian front. Besides protecting her mighty prestige, the British elite fundamentally targeted to seize the oil fields over there and secure its existence in the Middle East. Eventually, the war between the British and the Ottoman Empire was inevitable and the first attack was launched on Nov. 5, 1914 at Basra just few days after the beginning of the war. Starting with this date, this study includes the armed engagements between the two armies until the surrender of the Anglo-Indian army in Kut on April 29, 1916.

In the second chapter, I tried to focus on the colonial mentalities of the British and the Ottoman elites. This chapter has two section. In the first one, I try to illustrate the formation of the Ottoman colonialism. We know that the Ottoman elites had undertaken modernist policies especially after the Tanzimat Edict in 1839. However, here I try to illustrate the impact of modernization process and its indispensable on the remote parts of the empire, specifically on the Arabian lands. To the Ottoman elites coming from the central or modernized core of the Ottoman Empire, the Arabs, especially nomads, were living in a 'state of nature'. In the Ottoman colonial framework, the Indians and the Arabs were not the same but quite similar. There was also an Arab independence movement brewing during the WWI. Nevertheless, the elites coming from Istanbul approached and perceived this process in a different manner. In order to be a fully modern empire, they had to act in accordance with the modern norms and practices implemented by the 'progressive' centre. The practical results of this mentality and its implications were experienced during the war, especially towards the Indian soldiers in the Mesopotamian front.

In the second section of the chapter, the central object is the effects of British colonialism over the Indians. In its very essence, colonialism creates a bifurcation that on the one side there is a colonizer; on the other the colonized one. Here, the focus shifts to the colonized one. The Indians were described with their lacks and absences by the superior white man. Through the creation of inferiority discourse, this colonial mentality penetrates deep into the society. The local population acknowledged the superiority of the British so that this war turned into a chance to prove their loyalty to the crown. Not just in psychological status, colonialism brought the physical violence with it. This part leans on the penetration of the British colonial mentality into the cells of the Indian society and its exercise of colonial rule by utilizing “violence”.

The last chapter focuses completely on the experiences of the Indians in the Mesopotamian world. Perceiving the war as the golden opportunity, they volunteered the war. However, they lived the bitterness of the war. Especially after the defeat at Ctesiphon [*Selmân-ı Pâk* for the Ottomans], they were blamed for the defeat by the British officers. They were beaten and killed by the Tommies. After the surrender, in April 1916 they encountered with the Ottoman colonialism and were sent to the labour camps by marching in the desert. The main focus of this chapter is to investigate their alienation in the war. Arriving in this geography in order to become the agent in their lives, but most of them suffered considerably.

To sum up, the focus of this study is the war experiences of the Indian/Bengali soldiers who were hundreds of miles away from their homeland. This limited research is by no means of attempting to study colonialism in general or scrutinize its mental implications over the colonized people. On the one hand, as one of the greatest powers of the time, Great Britain had already embraced colonial strategies to maintain its strength during the war. On the other, as the greatest Islamic power of the time, the Ottoman Empire borrowed these practices and tried to reconcile them with its Islamic identity in order to modernize the Ottoman Empire as a whole including the Arab lands. Focusing on the lives of the Indian soldiers in the Mesopotamian front, this study does not address the British and

Ottoman colonialism in their totality but concentrates upon the reflections of that whole, i.e., the miserable experiences of the sepoys because of these colonial strategies.

## CHAPTER 1: THE BATTLEFIELD

### 1.1. THE DECISION

After the failure at Gallipoli in 1915, the military might of Great Britain and France had come under scrutiny by several onlookers and observers all around the world. This really had seismic repercussions as people began to have a sense of mistrust in the foundations of British power. Defending the Straits and not letting the allied navy to pass Dardanelles was a great success. This had soared the Ottomans' military power and officers' reputation. After the colossal defeat at Balkan Wars in 1912 – 1913 this victory was much needed for the Ottoman officer's morale and integrity. However soon the British turned their face to another strategic point in the Middle East in order to fulfill their imperial aspirations and to recover their prestige again.

The Middle East as a region had the most attractive commodity, i.e., oil within its borders. The British just like other imperial powers desired to get hold of this natural resource. In that sense, the fundamental aim of the British ruling class was to establish its monopoly over oil facilities in Iraq. Already obtained capitulations and trade privileges from the Ottoman government in the province of Basra had not quenched the never-ending thirst of the British ruling elite for conquest. Even though they had owned most of the facilities there, their focus this time was channeled to the oil facilities placed up in the North, in the Kurdish region. They were also trying to make themselves the absolute suzerain on oil also by getting the local Arab tribes in the south on their side.<sup>1</sup> Having this intention and grand aspirations in mind, in October 1914, 6th Poona Division under the command of Brigadier General Delemain set sail from Bombay to protect the oil facilities and capture, if possible, the port of Basra.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the British army initiated the war against Ottomans in Mesopotamia on 5 November 1914 and concomitantly commenced their attacks in the region the next day.

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<sup>1</sup> Zekeriya Türkmen, haz., *Kut'lu Bir Zafer* (İstanbul: Askeri Müze ve Kültür Sitesi Komutanlığı, 2016), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Charles V.F. Townshend, *Mezopotamya Seferim* (İstanbul: Kültür, 2012), 35.



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For the British, Iraq meant more than just taking the possession of oil facilities it had. Great Britain wanted to retain its colonial power and they were determined not to leave their prestige. Charles Hardinge who was the Viceroy in British India - photographed with his family in the early stage of his viceroyalty in 1910- mobilized in that sense Indians in WWI. He was very aware that the prestige is a cornerstone of being an imperial power. As the representative of the British power in India, he was also very conscious that one of the biggest dangers for an imperial power that colonization has become an essence in its very nature was that the people

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<sup>3</sup> George Morton-Jack, 1910, in *Army of Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

it colonized realized that its power was fragile. British prestige in that sense had been seriously damaged at Gallipoli by defeat at the hands of the “lowly Turk”. German officer Hans Kannangiesser was clear that Gallipoli had been a victory against the odds for the Anatolian peasant-soldier: “Firm will stubborn devotion, unshakable loyalty to their sultan and caliph, on the part of the Turks, gained them the victory against the superior might and crushing material of the Entente. Psychological powers triumphed over physical, the spirit over the material.”<sup>4</sup> The defeat at Gallipoli pushed the wounded British lions to look for another front for the purpose of taking its vengeance. It was also a message to British colonial subjects in order to break their hopes for a search for independence in the future.

“Because the colonial subjects were crowded and their rulers were few in numbers, they continued domination of one by the other depending to a large degree on the mere resemblance and symbols of power. Stripped to its essentials, colonialism was based on fear of the bully. In the end, native people paid taxes, did menial work and were subjected to abuse because they were scared of authority.”<sup>5</sup>

It was a must for the British to prove otherwise in Mesopotamia, as the vulnerability of European colonial power was proved by Turks in Gallipoli.

Another dimension of the Mesopotamian campaign is related to British colonial strategy. Ongoing projects like the construction of the Baghdad railway project under the supervision of German engineers had worried the British in the sense of “establishing a threat for its existence in India.”<sup>6</sup> Germany was the main threat for the British in the region because of the fact that this actual enemy desired to revive the silk-road through the Baghdad railway project. This could have put the authority and strength of the British in India in jeopardy. Britain did not want a powerful Germany next to Indian borders where it maintained its colonialism there for decades. Over and above that, since the Ottomans became allies of Germany, the territorial connection between Egypt and India being the backbones of British

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Faulkner, *Lawrence of Arabia's War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 87.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Türkmen, *Ibid.*, 29.

colonialism got into an interruption. Also, the British intended to increase its power in the region, with the aim of preventing the Ottoman policy of attracting people in the region with Islamic discourse and destroying the Ottoman army by uniting with



the Russians who planned to move to the south of Iran. Nonetheless, the main purpose -to attain full capitalized strength on oil facilities- pushed and forced the British to intervene in Iraq.



“Experiences shared by the 1 million Indian servicemen sent overseas in the First World War—gathering at port in British India, here at Bombay in 1914 (top); passing the time on deck at sea, here in the Persian Gulf in lifejackets in 1916 (middle); and disembarking in foreign lands, as here in East Africa, packed onto a landing craft at the port of Dar es Salaam in 1917 (bottom).”<sup>7</sup>



Brigadier General Delemain was appointed as the commander of the expeditionary force on October 7, 1914 by the Government of India whose duty was the invasion of Iraq. The Government ordered him to safeguard British rights and interests in the Persian Gulf. He was also informed that “the Shaikh of Muhammara -

Muhammara Tribe cooperated with British forces in the attacks against Ottoman forces in the battle of Qurna- was their ally and should have cooperated with him.”<sup>8</sup> He got the message that he must have taken all the possible measures for the

<sup>7</sup> George Morton-Jack, 1914-1916-1917, in *Army of Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Ghosh, *At 'Home and the World' in Iraq 1915-17*, 3.

protection of Basra when the fighting started. By undertaking these duties, Delamain started off his journey and reached the region to actualize his campaign. Photographed in 1914, here at Bombay just before sailing (top), Indians were in a great hope to seize an opportunity in this journey. Contrary to their great hopes, the destiny showed them no mercy in this journey. Passing time on the deck in Persian Gulf in 1916 (middle) to get the Iraq region under British control, the lifejackets on them would not protect them in the barren lands of Iraq.

“The military success in Gallipoli prompted Enver Pasha to respond to the military needs of the commanders on other fronts, as he mitigated the situations in Istanbul to some extent. In Mesopotamia, the Ottomans had fielded ill-trained and poorly supplied troops to face the Anglo-Indian juggernaut.”<sup>9</sup> The necessity of a fresh and disciplined army to meet the British forces pushed Enver Pasha to send two divisions to the region, being under the threat of Anglo-Indian forces, to turn the situation for the Ottomans’ side.

Since the British were aware of the seriousness of the situation in the region, and in order to realize their expectations there, they tried to establish the troops as well as they could. The 6th Poona Division was conscripted of a mixture of British Army units including “the Dorsets, the Norfolks, and Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry together with Indian units including the 22nd Punjabis.”<sup>10</sup>

The struggle in the region had given the signal which both sides should have pushed up their field strengths. In this respect, the opposing forces were strengthened by their units to overcome their insufficiencies in the battlefields. British army took the necessary precautions by pushing the Egyptian forces to the battlefield and appointed Nixon as the commander. On the other hand, Enver Pasha responded to the initiatives of the British by sending his dear friend Suleyman Askeri to Iraq as the Commanding Officer (CO) of the Ottoman forces.

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<sup>9</sup> Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 217.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Garraway, *The Indian Army in Mesopotamia: Forgotten Prisoners, Forgotten Army, Forgotten War* (Manchester: Crime&Ethics, 2015), 127-8.

## 1.2. THE WAR STARTS

British forces, at the beginning of the war, advanced towards Baghdad without any significant resistance. First, the Sixth Poona Division arrived in Iraq on October 14 and captured the city of Fav under the command of General Barrett. Then, the forces proceeded to their marching towards the north. By starting the attacks on 6 November 1914, British forces moved through Basra. Due to the rapid advance of Anglo-Indian forces, Enver Pasha felt the urgency to intervene in the situation and appointed Suleyman Askeri as the CO of Iraq. Although British troops had advanced without any serious confrontations, they got their reinforcements as new divisions from Egypt in February when they realized their forces were insufficient in Iraq. With the reinforcements, the British elevated their forces into the level of army corps. Besides, “General Nixon was appointed as the commander of British forces in Iraq on 9 April 1915.”<sup>11</sup>

Suleyman Askeri tried to recruit *mujahids* from local Arab tribes to halt the British advance, however, it did not go well. Ottoman *jihad* policy was not taken seriously by the Arab tribes. They made ties with whoever made the highest bid for their services on the battlefield. The British realized that Ottoman forces attacked at Basra through the Tigris without passing over Qurna. As a result, the British decided to wait until the Ottomans attack by getting a part of their forces from Qurna to Shaibe in the west of Qurna. By capturing Nasiriyya in his march, Suleyman Askeri attacked the British in Shaibe. For a battle that lasted for two successive days and nights, he was far from being content by the sheer display of cowardice from the Arab *mujahids* at battlefield as they fled from the battlefield on the second day. After having lost almost half of his forces, Suleyman Askeri had to retreat on 14 April. Due to his failure and defeat in this battle, he committed suicide.<sup>12</sup>

The Ottoman position in Mesopotamia had deteriorated alarmingly in the aftermath of Suleyman Askeri’s defeat at Shaibe. High rate of desertion among Iraqi

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<sup>11</sup> Mahir Küçükvatan, “İngiliz Basımında Kutul Amare Zaferi,” *Çağdas Türkiye Araştırmaları Dergisi* XIII, s. 26 (2013): 57.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-8.

recruits aggravated losses through heavy battlefield casualties, leaving Ottoman forces severely decapitated.

As time went on, the struggle between the two sides became much sour which obliged opponents to adopt stringent measures in order to be triumphant. Also, the death of Suleyman Askeri made the center take a necessary step to intervene in the region by appointing Colonel Nureddin Bey as the CO of the Ottoman forces in Iraq on 20 April 1915. On the other side, General Nixon was commanding two divisions in Iraq. Besides, since Sir Arthur Barrett, the commander of the forces in the region, had resigned due to his health problems, General Townshend was appointed at the place opened by Barrett and he reached Basra after a few days after the battle of Shaibe.<sup>13</sup>

The marching of Anglo-Indian forces continued with all its dedication. On May 31, the forces attacked at Qurna. Once again, Turkish forces could not stand the enemy attacks forcing them to withdraw their forces the same night. British took the possession of Qurna and held the region of old Basra comprising of Amara, Nasiriyya, and Basra following days so that secured the entire Ottoman province of Basra. The army maintained its advance through the north with little confrontation.

Nixon received intelligence stated that Ottoman troops comprising of 2,000 men who retreated from Nasiriyya had settled in Kut where they joined forces with a garrison of 5,000 men and could have put British's regional position in jeopardy. Nixon's thought was that as long as the Ottomans withheld Kut, Britain's control over the province of Basra would not be safe.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the next step to be taken had to be decided as soon as possible.

The sequential victories of Anglo-Indian forces in the battlefields widen the military horizons of the soldiers on the one hand. In addition, it also increased their self-confidence. On the other hand, this sense of being the absolute victor of battlefields brought the lack of taking necessary precautions. General Nixon had convinced the Viceroy in India that the army he already had under his command was sufficient to get the region under British control.

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<sup>13</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, Chapter 2,3.

<sup>14</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 223.

To face the British troops, Nureddin Bey established a defensive position at Es-Sin which was located in the south of Kut. Nonetheless, the Ottoman forces could not have objected to the attacks which started on 28 September and ended with massive casualties the next day. The British troops captured Kut on 29 September. By taking Kut, the British secured the province of Basra and procured almost all the water canals under its control in the region. Nevertheless, the chain of unstoppable victories broke down at the next stage of the campaign.

The Anglo-Indian troops proceeded their advances northwards by tearing the Turkish resistance down and with high-morale stemmed from the repeated victories in the battlefields. But they did not take into account the psychological burden under which their enemies were crushed. The next defeat meant Baghdad's disposal which would be the last drop for the Ottoman Empire in this war. Turkish forces established a well-trenched position at Ctesiphon and waited to stem the tide of the ultimate objective of its enemy, taking possession of Baghdad. This "river-picnic" of British-Indian forces came to an end with the battle of Ctesiphon placed in just south of Baghdad.

On the eve of the battle of Ctesiphon, General Townshend ordered two aircraft for getting information about the enemies' positions. The aerial reconnaissance contributed a great deal of support to the army in the sense of organizing their strategy managed in the battlefield to some extent. The first plane returned safely and briefed the Ottoman position with no changes. The second one realized some alteration in the Ottoman lines and tried to draw near for a closer look. However, it was detected and shot by Ottoman troops whereby the bullet hit the plane's engine. The situation made the pilot crash, landing behind the Ottoman lines where he fell into the enemy's territory.

"The downing of the British plane not only prevented Townshend from learning that his troops were dangerously outnumbered by an Ottoman force by more than 20,000 men but also did a great deal to raise morale among Turkish troops. 'This little event was taken as a happy omen that the luck of the enemy was about the change,' Turkish officer noted."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

Not leaking the intelligence into the British hands trapped the fate into an ambush which changed the destiny of the war for a while. The ignorance of General Townshend concerning his opponents' position turned the fighting in Ottoman's favour. The element of luck in the course of events affected thousands of lives in this region during this time.

A victory at Ctesiphon, just a step away from Baghdad would both have made the Ottoman Empire lose its grasp in the region and facilitated to recuperate the British prestige being shattered with the defeat at Gallipoli. In this framework, despite all the risks, Lord Kitchener had given the allowance to General Nixon for the attack. With this permission, Nixon ordered Townshend to take an offensive approach against the Ottomans for the sole purpose of marching towards Baghdad on 14 November.

On the other hand, knowing another defeat would have brought about losing the entire region of Mesopotamia with itself led the Ottoman side to intervene in the present state of its forces. The troops in Iraq, Mosul, and Iran were combined and then shaped as two separate divisions. By banding these newly established divisions also, together with the Iraq forces being under the head of Nureddin Bey, the Ottoman side formed the 6th Army and appointed notorious German Marshall Von der Goltz as the chief commander. The appointment of "German" General Von der Goltz to the top rank caused dissatisfaction to Nureddin Bey who prompted Enver Pasha to send Colonel Halil to Iraq to alleviate the situation and provide a reinforcement to halt the Anglo-Indian advance.

The British attacked the Ottoman fronts on the morning of 22 November. Contrary to the previous fighting, the British troops had to handle it with great aversion while Ottoman forces established solid defense in trenches. The Ottomans mounted a fierce counterattack with some of their most experienced troops from the 51st Division.<sup>16</sup> The fighting lasted three days and nights when the British had to evacuate their trenches. As a consequence, the ultimate objective came eventually to naught. Facing such a confrontation was not anticipated. An Indian

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

soldier *Sisir Sarbadhikari* describes in his letter the viewpoint of the British forces. He decided to make some tea and light a fire the night just before the war. However, one of the other soldiers warned him not to use water unnecessarily in case things don't go in their favor.

“I said: No water? Are you crazy? This ‘jackal-fight’ will be over in a trice and we will be in Baghdad at around 3 in the afternoon. There’ll be no shortage of water then. Perhaps when I said this the unseen goddess was laughing in secret: I certainly did reach Baghdad but not at 3 that day- after some six months and in completely different circumstances.”<sup>17</sup>

Townshend and his army who advanced north to Ctesiphon now had to retreat southward on the same road after their defeat here. It was the Ottoman order to nullify all possible threats from their enemy. Halting the enemy at Ctesiphon not only prevented failing to keep possession of Baghdad which if hadn't happened would have paved the way for losing the entire southern region of the empire. Nonetheless, it also had an enormous impact on the course of events as the region came into existence afterward. After the end of the river picnic with the casualties of approximately 4,000 men, the British troops drove back to the south with the Ottoman pursuit just behind them. “A rearguard action is exceptionally difficult. On the one hand, you have to wage war on the enemy and at the same time, you have to keep falling back in such a way not to expose your vulnerability at the battlefield and also minimize the loss of men and arsenal.”<sup>18</sup> This rearguard action had lasted for almost one week and arrived at the conclusion in early December at Kut al-Amara where they were besieged on 7 December and took defense position for about five months.

Decision to billet the garrison in Kut was approached from different perspectives that opened a space for a hot debate among historians examining the war in Mesopotamia. Mainstream assumption among modern military historians influenced by Townshend's memoir was of coming into the conclusion that it was a deliberate action to retreat up until Kut. The argument was of Arthur J. Barker

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<sup>17</sup> Ghosh, *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

that “probably Townshend had intended to fall back and stand at Kut from the moment he realized that the Turks were on the march.”<sup>19</sup> In the same framework, the allegiance of Russel Braddon was on the same line with Barker that Townshend’s formative experience at Chidral had led him to fix his sight on Kut where he said: “He could sit out another siege and, when he was relieved, a hero again, he would take command of an adequate force, seize Baghdad, become its governor and who knows what else?”<sup>20</sup> Among the most recent study on the war in Mesopotamia, the historian Charles Townshend shares the same idea that “General Townshend chose Kut as his primary objective during the initial stages of his retreat from Ctesiphon”<sup>21</sup> whereas challenges borne with the recent study of Nicolas Gardner assumed that the siege appears to have been almost unavoidable if Kut was resolved as the last point for deployment during the Battle of Ctesiphon or shortly afterward when the period of the retreat was characterized by uncertainty as the commander on both sides struggled to discern the whereabouts and intentions of their adversary that initial intention of Townshend was to make only a short withdrawal from Ctesiphon. However, the exhaustion of both his forces and himself convinced him to go no further and settle in Kut where he was surrounded on three fronts by the Tigris.<sup>22</sup> The idea was, in short, of submitted by Gardner that the course of events brought about the halt in Kut, not the intention from the outset as argued by others.

Sheltering at Kut put Townshend between two horns that on the one hand, he had to repel the Turkish attacks and save time for relief forces to rescue the army out of the town. On the other hand, he had to deal with providing and managing provisions to supply the demands of the soldiers till the end of the siege, if not, they were at the risk of starvation and that would certainly let them fall into the clutches of the enemy. Colonel Nurettin Bey sent a message to Townshend offering him to surrender with his troops, otherwise, he will start his attacks to enter the town.

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<sup>19</sup> Nicolas Gardner, *The Siege of Kut-al-Amara, At War in Mesopotamia 1915-16* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), 44.

<sup>20</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Townshend, *When God Made Hell* (London:Faber, 2011), 167.

<sup>22</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 44.

Having approximately two months' rations and believing with a strong sense of hope in relieving force could help them out persuade Townshend that this inevitable siege would be of short duration.

The very mistake made by Townshend in this period was to underestimate the duration of the siege. Despite ordering the construction of defenses around Kut, he failed to make a thorough checklist of the food available in the town for his force's sustenance. This underestimation and the neglect of General Townshend led Nixon and Aylmer to take hasty actions to expedite and intensify their efforts to relieve Kut in January, with disastrous results.<sup>23</sup> Besides, Townshend's allowance of approximately 6,000 local inhabitants of Kut remains inside rather than evicting them at the beginning of the siege<sup>24</sup> put Townshend and his soldiers in a difficult corner that as Barker commented in his study that: "It may have been humane to let them remain, eat up their own grain and that of the besieged force but when the consequences of that decision are assessed in terms of soldiers' lives, it may seem that it would have been preferable to expel many more."<sup>25</sup> All the failure at the outset had undoubtedly grounded the reason for this initiation.

Upon sheltered as the eventual destination after a while of the intense hunt, the next step was to decide what was ought to be implemented to make the Kut garrison surrender or push them out of the war which was confronted by Colonel Nureddin Bey with Field Marshal Colmar Freiherr Von der Goltz whose appointment in the region as the chief commander of the Ottoman 6th Army Nureddin did not approve of and was discontent from the onset. On the one hand, Nureddin wished to storm Kut and defeat the British outright whereas, on the other hand, Von der Goltz sided with the idea of preserving his forces from needless losses and argued for a tightening of the siege to starve the British into surrender; which the two were unable to resolve. Not to miss the opportunity in the sense of defeating unbeatable enemy which had gotten the upper hand over and over again in the battles and was so close its ultimate goal of taking Baghdad till Ctesiphon,

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 129.

following Goltz's left to inspect the Persian front, Colonel Nureddin Bey launched his attack on Kut on Christmas Eve.<sup>26</sup>

The cannon fire began to beat the rampart made of mud-bricks on 7 December. The holes opened by the cannons gave way for the Ottoman forces to find the fortress. However, the British had prepared a line of defense behind the walls with wire netting which prevented the Ottoman soldiers' advance through the town thereby, causing them massive fatalities in this second line. Continuing the attacks would have crippled the Ottoman forces in so great amount that Colonel Nurettin Bey decided to maintain the siege with a part of his forces and send some to the south of Kut to dig and establish fortified trenches in any case of forthcoming attacks of relief dawn on them suddenly. Thus, implementing this plan not only economizes his forces but also supplied him as many forces as possible to prevent the relief force reaching Kut as well. Both sides exhausted all their efforts to take necessary precautions to take things by the scruff of the neck and turn the tide in their favor.

The region hosted a chaotic state imposed by several sides that each bore a distinctive mission with great ambition. One had the intention of pinning its ill-fate down not just for this war but for its last one hundred years of labefaction and at the same time had to establish a formidable challenge skillfully proven in Ctesiphon for the attacks aimed to relieve Kut. The other had to overcome the shock he had experienced in Ctesiphon and had to wait to be rescued without putting the enemy into Kut. Above all, the ones who tried to overcome the struggle among the powers that they had no relation with or derive any benefit from and wished to get through as less harm as possible.

The reiterated offensive actions of the Ottoman forces put the besieged army of Townshend in a tough position that each day dissolved the strength of the manpower in Kut. Day after day without reinforcement and under the enemy attacks, the possibility to contribute to the relief force of Townshend diminished. It was an urgent call for the relief force to deliver its actions in the region to repel the

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<sup>26</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 245.

Turkish siege south of the town. For this very purpose, “the first to arrive was General George Younghusband to the region after he secured Aden from further Ottoman attacks with his 28th Brigade on 2 December.”<sup>27</sup> In pursuit of Younghusband’s arrival, Lieutenant General Sir Fenton Aylmer came to the region as the commander of the relief force and accepted the duty of rescuing the besieged army out of the town ordered by General Nixon. The first attempt to defeat the Ottoman army on the Tigris and lift the siege came into existence at Shaik Saad on 7 December almost twenty-five miles downstream from Kut. The relief force was not at its full-strength to be capable of defeating the enemy and show them a way out of the trenches they held. General Younghusband was ordered to advance against the Ottoman positions on Tigris with “only three brigades at his disposal - some 12,000 men in all”<sup>28</sup>, which afterward he acknowledged in his memoirs as a huge mistake which the course of events proved right. Irrespective of the insufficiency, the relief force had some accomplishments. At first, they managed to push the Ottoman forces out of the trenches they held after four days of struggle then set up their base camp in Shaik Saad. Defeating the Ottomans in the region at the first attempt not only raised the morale of Anglo-Indian army besieged and trapped during almost thirty days in Kut but also brought a serious change in the Ottoman army about the command echelon that Colonel Halil Bey took the command over from Colonel Nurettin Bey by the order of General Goltz. Having trouble with Nurettin Bey, on 10 January, he shifted all the forces deployed from the right side of the Tigris to the left bank to start with.<sup>29</sup>

The first skirmish between the two sides resulted in Aylmer’s favor to some extent that the casualties of Aylmer were 3793 injured and roughly 600-700 dead<sup>30</sup> and although the ultimate objective to conquer Baghdad was not obtained yet, the liberation of Kut was pulled off. Due to responding to appeal for help, Aylmer started its second attack on 12 January and engaged the Ottoman forces at al-Wadi, “a tributary of the Tigris River with the strategy that while General Kemball held

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Erhan Çifci, ed., *Kutü'l Amare Kahramanı* (İstanbul: Timaş, 2018), 152.

<sup>30</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, 432-3.

the enemy from the front, General Younghusband turned the position which Kemball put the pressure on the enemy through the east bank of the valley, ranging almost three kilometers, and Younghusband beleaguered the north side of the enemy.”<sup>31</sup> While contributing the smash-ups between Halil and Aylmer in the south, due to the expanding of the frontage, Halil Bey ordered to prepare new emplacements at Falahiye placed in between the Tigris and the impassable swamps of Suveyce. Thus, the frontage became deep and narrow which did not only prevent Aylmer’s forces encircling maneuver but also forced them to frontal attack as well. “Turkish forces retreated fractionally to the new positions established at Falahiye on 13th and 14th January.”<sup>32</sup> “The British lost over 1,600 dead and wounded men, reducing Aylmer’s column to just 9,000 men.”<sup>33</sup> Now, Aylmer had to encounter with the enemy from the front without the possibility of bypassing the enemy.

Positioning his army in a well-sheltered area, Halil Bey compelled the Aylmer’s forces to frontal attack, otherwise, he would have had to bypass around the swamps through the north which meant marching the army about eighty kilometers with insufficient supply and full connection with the river line. In these circumstances on 21 January, Aylmer ordered his troops into a frontal assault across the open ground on well-entrenched Ottoman positions at Hanna. “Both the strength of the Ottoman defense line and the effect of luck that the attackers slipped and stumbled in the slick of mud left by days of heavy rain”<sup>34</sup> prevented the British side to reach the victory. Even though some of the right-wing trenches of the Ottoman forces were held down with severe clashes, “the Ottoman forces managed to repel the assaults with a counter-attack and swept away the enemy from the trenches once held down.”<sup>35</sup> Aylmer informed Townshend about the futile attacks to Ottoman lines and his plan to assault again tomorrow so as to relieve him that he had no hope for victory; which concluded so. Since the collapse of the purpose, the Aylmer’s force abandoned the attacks and drew back from the Hanna position of hideous

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Küçükvatan, *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>33</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Çifci, *Ibid.*, 15.

memory with Younghusband's words – “with roughly 8,000 casualties together with dead and wounded which was the first time the British suffered much more than they were able to inflict.”<sup>36</sup> This was really a grave and unprecedented situation in Britain’s military history. It was indeed a battle that tested the resilience, forbearance, and dexterity of British military men. In these circumstances, as Aylmer informed Townshend, he had decided to wait for the next assault till new reinforcements arrived.

While the smash-ups among the two forces waved on, Townshend had to handle the calamity of the food supply in a state of desperate hope for relief in Kut. He saw three options to extricate himself with his army from this trap. One was a break-out that paved the way for putting the Ottoman army in between the Aylmer’s and his forces, then merged with some of his forces to lift the siege as Aylmer suggested to him on 17 January.

Nevertheless, “the plan bore too many risks in it that only if luck was on their side would it have panned out.”<sup>37</sup> As Townshend’s words which if not had gone in that way, both his and Aylmer’s forces got into trouble with the Ottoman army and also put his army left behind in grave peril because he could not actualize the break-out thereby making a false impression on him by forces in Kut that he had deserted his plan. Second, he promised to keep his positions in Kut with his utmost ability even until the very last moments when he couldn’t endure any longer. Lastly, he could negotiate with the enemy to discuss the terms to end the siege. The second one was decided as the best which made him take every measure to extend the siege as long as possible with the already existing resources.

Above all, Townshend had to deal with the supply management in Kut. Briefing the situation he was in Kut in the message to Aylmer on 24 January, Townshend stated that “he had twenty-two days rations and had to manage the rations not just for his forces but also for the Arab population numbered more than 6,000 inside Kut.”<sup>38</sup> As the priority to reduce the consumption of supplies, all

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<sup>36</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>37</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, 461.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.

rations cut by half so as to prolong the siege. Since not providing a sufficient amount of time in the sense of waiting for the relief force, Townshend decided to take a harsh measure that his troops were undertaking the duty of conducting a house-by-house search to commandeer food stores. The result was uncovering nine hundred tons of barley, one hundred tons of wheat, and nineteen tons of cooking butter or ghee hoarded by indigenes.<sup>39</sup> Finding the food provisions resulted in the extension of the time in terms of food supply when combined with the British store from twenty-two to eighty-four days<sup>40</sup> which paved the way for gaining time to take new reinforcements to the relief force for further operations.

Until the end of the first week of March, no serious fighting in the region can be registered. Over the month of February, Aylmer waited for the new reinforcements waved from other fronts like France to Basra patiently which neither was Townshend. So 1,100 animals were slaughtered to take precautions for extending the time needed for Aylmer to 15 April.<sup>41</sup> The wave of reinforcements continued. Whereas Aylmer's aim based on obtaining numerical superiority over the Ottoman forces, they were being reinforced with new fresh troops each passing day while the troops in Kut grew weaker and sicker due to shortages of food and medicine.<sup>42</sup> In that sense, before all the reinforcements had arrived, Aylmer decided to take the offensive approach against the Ottoman lines at the beginning days of March. His mind was to appeal the enemy with a surprise attack that might have opened the way of Kut with the creation of chaos which in that sense the decision was to march the troops overnight to Dujaila redoubt where the last major defensive point of the enemy before Kut. The attack started at sunrise on 8 March, later than the planned time due to weather conditions. After night marching, confronting and overcoming a plethora of hurdles, luck was finally on the Ottoman side again.

“The disoriented British columns, crossing uneven and unfamiliar terrain in the dark, were delayed in their night march. At sunrise on 8 March, the attackers were still 4,000 yards from the Dujaila redoubt. The British

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 517.

<sup>42</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 257.

commanders assumed the Ottomans would have seen their columns arriving across the flat ground in the early dawn light.”<sup>43</sup>

As experienced with previous fighting Aylmer did not take the risk to order his troops in a direct attack towards Ottoman trenches over flat ground. He held the troops back with getting intense artillery bombardment into action against empty Ottoman trenches. This alarmed the Ottoman forces about the enemy attack and facilitated them to fill the empty trenches as Ali İhsan Sabis stated that: “The enemy did not send their infantry forward while their artillery was firing on us, which we benefited from this mistake and all of our troops managed to arrive.”<sup>44</sup>

When the heavy smash-ups came to an end, the one who tasted the defeat was the British side. The mistake not to assault in the right time not only brought about the defeat that the British casualties outnumbered the Ottomans three times more but also imposed a great despair both on the army in Kut and the soldiers in the relief force. On the other, the magnitude of the Ottoman victory boosted the soldiers’ morale to a great extent. This actual victory allowed Halil Pasha for the opportunity to capitalize on the collapse of the defenders’ morale and sent a message to the commander of Kut inviting him to surrender on 10 March.<sup>45</sup> He wrote the following message to General Townshend:

“Your majesty,

The British force coming to relieve you had to retreat after the battle in Falahiye and caused 7,000 casualties. Since this retreat, making preparations during one and a half month Aylmer with his forces numbered 5, 6, 8, 12 infantry brigades and one cavalry corps that he thought they were sufficient to defeat us and took the offensive from the right bank of the Tigris which again he had to retreat with lost 4,000 men. I was in a state to hold him.

About you... You have heroically fulfilled your military duty. Henceforth, there is no likelihood that you will be relieved. According to your deserters’ reports, I believe you are really troubled and plagued with food shortages and diseases are prevalent among your soldiers.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

You are free to continue your resistance in Kut or to surrender to my forces which are growing continuously larger and larger.

I expect you to accept my great respect and gratitude, General highness.

The Commander of the Ottoman troops in Iraq and the Governor of Baghdad”<sup>46</sup>

The General responded contrary to the offer with reciprocate gratitude and claimed a contrary argument to Halil’s belief in the relief force to a great extent to arrive for help.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, this absolute defeat at Dujaila redoubt known to Turks as Sabis Hill made Townshend think and asked permission to enter the negotiation with Halil Pasha if there was any doubt of his position being relieved by 17 April.<sup>48</sup>

The extent of this defeat caused to spread of its effect to the parliament where hosted heated debates to define the actual individual in charge of the disgrace in the war thus, General Aylmer was suspended from duty and left his position to General Gorringe.

The fresh commander of British forces in the region General Gorringe launched his first effort to break through Ottoman lines to meet with success on 5 April; which pushed the enemy to drive back at Sannaiyat. On the other side of the coin, the situation in Kut was so desperate that during the smash-ups everyone’s hope rose since from the 5th to 7th the insiders heard the cannons. Besides, “not only did they hear them but also could see the flashes and the smoke rising from the battlefields.”<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, this success did not resume after successive actions which they were halted there with heavy casualties. Getting no result at the attacks through the left bank of the Tigris against the Falahiya trenches of the Ottoman troops, Gorringe took his chance on the right bank immediately, which was defended by 2nd and 35th Divisions connected to 13th corps under the command of Colonel Ali İhsan (later Sabis). Comprising of four brigades which amounted roughly to 9,000 men, the British launched their second attack with the troops being in a state of lack of confidence to extirpate the enemy from their sturdy trenches on

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<sup>46</sup> Çifci, *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>47</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.* 521.

<sup>48</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>49</sup> Ghosh, *Ibid.*, 23.

17 April at Bait İsa which they occupied Turkish trenches at the outset of the fighting. However, reinforced 13th corps stormed their counter-attack the same evening that the Turkish charge succeeded and all the positions captured by the British were taken back at Bait-İsa which cost them “3541 bodies and wounded military personnel in total for the Ottoman side and approximately 1600 men for the British.”<sup>50</sup> During the conflicts which occurred on the battlefields, the commander of the 6th Army Field Marshal Von der Goltz died at Baghdad on 19 April which was succeeded by Halil Bey.

The successive defeats collapsed the British forces in terms of their passions to fight. Likely to the passion of the troops, the hope of the insiders fell underground; they concluded that the English would not be able to relieve Kut and many tried to leave.<sup>51</sup> “The most striking form of hardship or suffering without a shadow of doubt was the scarcity of food among not only the soldiers but also the people of Kut that the rations which were given amounted to nothing.”<sup>52</sup> In addition to food shortages, dysentery and scurvy hit the town which summed up the troubles and accounted for almost 15 dead people per day.<sup>53</sup> Taking all these along with other struggles they faced into consideration, Townshend left no avenue unexplored and no stone unturned so he had to resort to remedy to address the mishap befalling his men. Unsurprisingly, he managed to convince Indian soldiers to be fed with horse meat providing them with the necessary protein requirements. Strange as it may seem, they refused to eat due to religious and societal values and ethics they conform to and held in high esteem which forbid them to eat meat. According to their beliefs, this (Intake of meat) was synonymous to sacrilege whereby strict and oftentimes extreme penalties could be meted to recalcitrants. Moreover, they were scared if such news traveled beyond the walls and heard especially by their villagers would have severe consequences on their lives. It could tarnish their reputation, mar their clan’s image for generations and could even deprive them of getting a bride

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<sup>50</sup> Bahtiyar İstekli, ed., *Osmanlı'nın Unutulan Son Zaferi* (İstanbul: Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2016), 130.

<sup>51</sup> Ghosh, *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>53</sup> Küçükvatan, *Ibid.*, 75.

whenever they are ready to tie the knot. It really was a delicate and dicey issue to tackle and one to be treated as a matter of urgency otherwise most of them would die of infirmity. “Nevertheless, despite formal exoneration by both Hindu and Muslim religious authorities about the issue of eating horse meat, most refused to eat until they witnessed the starvation of Indian soldiers through the end of the siege.”<sup>54</sup>

Checked at Bait İsa, Gorringe used the last bullet in the gun at Sannaiyat placed at some fifteen miles from Kut. On 22 April, they were decisively repelled and had lost approximately 3,000-4,000 men in the battlefield while the enemy had 500-600 casualties.<sup>55</sup> This defeat was the last straw on the camel’s back which compelled Gorringe and his officers to call a halt to operations because of virtually having nothing left to do with their exhausted and demoralized troops to relieve Kut<sup>56</sup>. The operations to rescue 13,000 soldiers out in the last four months cost the relief force a whopping amount of their forces, approximately over 23,000 casualties.<sup>57</sup>

Although General Gorringe had acknowledged the failure of the mission, Sir Percy Lake was not yet willing to accept defeat. In that sense, to prolong the resistance of Kut garrison till the Tigris Corps was able to resume operations, he decided to take the last bid to buy time and initiate the final operation to resupply Townshend’s force with food and medicine through Ottoman blockade via the Tigris unbeknownst to Turks on the evening of 24 April. “The riverboat named *Julnar* weighed down by steel plates around her bridge, engine and laden with 270 tons of supplies that could provide sufficient amount of food to the garrison in Kut for three weeks embarked from Fallahiya with crew spearheaded by volunteers.”<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, striking a cable stretched by the Ottomans running across the river and under the intensified enemy fire, the ship became grounded. Captain Lieutenant H.O.B. Firman was killed by the fire while his crew were taken prisoners with all the stocks and stores. *Julnar*’s possession got hold of Ottoman hands<sup>59</sup> and was

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<sup>54</sup> Ghosh, *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Çifci, *Ibid.*, 157-8.

<sup>56</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>59</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 264.

renamed *Kendigelen*.<sup>60</sup> Coming the last effort to naught, General Townshend was authorized to commence the negotiation with Halil Bey to agree on terms of surrender on 26 April.

Not willing to take the responsibility of surrender, Townshend offered that the negotiation should have maintained among the high ranked commander. Nevertheless, this offer was refused and Townshend was ordered to enter into a negotiation with Halil under the conditions of starving and losing almost 20 men in a day and without just a bit of a biscuit.<sup>61</sup> In these circumstances, the local Arabs fled from Kut to the Ottoman side.<sup>62</sup> Halil Pasha initially agreed with Townshend on the terms of not letting the locals leave the town since to him, the locals were extra burdens for the garrison in the sense of their additional mouths to be fed. Behaving contrary to the deal, Halil sent a message to Townshend blaming him as breaking his word. In response to this accusation, Townshend fended himself of not letting the inhabitants to desert but claimed that despite his threat upon them to arrest the deserters, they fled by saying: “We are also Ottoman citizens and no doubt our Turkish brothers would not be in a state of misconduct with us.”<sup>63</sup>

Under all these circumstances, Townshend opened the negotiation with Halil Bey by offering his articles that “he would not be in any state of action against the Ottoman Empire during the war, the British garrison held in Kut would have delivered to Halil’s army and above all he offered the Ottomans a million pounds sterling in exchange for the release of his force.”<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, referring to the proposals to Enver Pasha, Halil Bey declared unconditional surrender as his offer to Townshend. In response, “Lake initiated his last effort -not getting personally involved- offering the services of Captains Herbert and infamous Lawrence that these young intelligence officers set off to meet Halil Pasha at dawn on 29 April”<sup>65</sup> while Townshend had already admitted his surrendering and destroyed his guns that

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<sup>60</sup> Çifci, *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>61</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, 593.

<sup>62</sup> Genelkurmay Personel Başkanlığı Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt (ATASE) Daire Başkanlığı Yayınları, *Askeri Tarih Belgeleri Dergisi* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 2016), 134.

<sup>63</sup> Ghosh, *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>64</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, 594.

<sup>65</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 245.

“everywhere you looked you saw columns of smoke rising into the clear sky as piles of saddles, broken mule carts and every variety of equipment of potential use to the enemy burnt away briskly, the flames fed with matting, fodder, empty boxes, and surplus wood. Rifle belts were dumped into the river, rifles smashed except for a few kept as protection against possible Arab miscreants in the town.”<sup>66</sup>

Captains’ proposal was to evacuate the sick British and wounded in exchange for healthy Ottomans in British camps which Halil had already agreed. However, their intention “was to extend this to cover all men on the contrary to Halil’s insist on exchanging Britons for Turks, Indians for Arabs that made the matter lapsed.”<sup>67</sup> Besides, the intelligence officers forwarded a new amount of “bribe in a disguised manner that might financially support the civilians in Kut- increased to 2 million pounds sterling which was swept under the carpet with contempt.”<sup>68</sup> When the turn for the proposal came to Halil, he requested “coaling for ships to transport the prisoners while this offer was rejected on the plea of war circumstances.”<sup>69</sup> The negotiation came to a deadlock and the British side tasted another defeat on the table which resulted in unconditional surrender with “5 Generals, 272 British officers ranged from lieutenant to colonel, 204 Indian officers, 2592 British soldiers, 6988 Indian soldiers, 3248 noncombatants and class of services, in total 13,309”<sup>70</sup> prisoners on 29 April 1916 after almost five months siege. The defeated General offered his sword and guns to Halil who refused to accept that with the response “These had yours up until now thus, henceforth will be yours.”<sup>71</sup> The Ottoman victory at Kut al-Amara was announced by Halil Pasha to everyone all over the country by declaring that “With the help of God, today is the day of conquest and the invasion of Kut.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 163-4.

<sup>67</sup> Neil Faulkner, *Ibid.*, 93-4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Milli Savunma Üniversitesi, *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi* (İstanbul: Milli Savunma Üniversitesi Merkez Basımevi, 2019), 59-60.

<sup>70</sup> ATASE, *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>71</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, 596.

<sup>72</sup> Ahmet Koçak ve Recep Çelik, *Türk Basınında Kutü'l Amare 1915-1916* (İstanbul: Akıl Fikir Yayınları, 2018), 112.

## CHAPTER 2: COLONIAL EYES

### 2.1. OTTOMAN COLONIAL EYES

In modern times, the Ottoman Empire is regarded as the greatest Muslim world empire that toiled hard to remain on its feet and also extend its vast territories albeit surrounded from all perimeters by enemies who set their sights on the Ottoman territories and its downfall. To achieve such an insurmountable task of dethroning the well-rooted and established empire, groundbreaking tactics and surreal military maneuvers had to be applied for this farfetched thought to become a reality. Unsurprisingly, the Ottoman empire was in a very challenging position. On one hand, it had a herculean task of having to deal with its enemies which were France, Britain, and after 1870 Germany who became leaders of the aggressive world powers then and desired to obtain abundant raw materials and resources within the Ottoman boundaries. On the other hand, the empire had to deal with its remote provinces which were like a boiling cauldron and it was only a matter of time before did they bring trouble to the Ottoman center. In this state, the Ottoman ruling elites had to produce the necessary policies. Under these sensitive conditions, during the latter decades of the 19th century, the Ottomans should have been able to compete with their enemies and keep up with their strategies to get out of the situation it was in. In this context, the Ottoman central elites initiated “the civilizing process”, especially on people with a nomadic structure in the provincial settings, placing them in a “colonial position”.

To the Ottoman center, nomads were in a state of savagery. Conducting the modernization strategies and perceiving the people as savages reshaped the peripheries and the inhabitants; therefore, the Ottoman center created its own East. On the one hand, the great powers of the West portrayed the Muslim Ottomans “as a brooding non-Western despotism incapable of progress.”<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the center applied similar policies applied by the Westerners to it. In other words, while Ottoman center tried to shatter the European perception towards itself about missing

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<sup>73</sup> Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism.” *The American Historical Review* 107, No. 3 (2002), 768.

qualities of civilization, it perceived its own people living in the remote provinces as uncivilized and a state of savagery.

The region and the people dwelling in the peripheries "in a state of so-called savagery" were paid the attention of the central elite so as to accord them to be conjunct with the empire via the reformist approach engaging in the policy of modernizing the empire. At the outset of the *Tanzimat*, the central reformist elites not only singled these subjects out as potential fellow citizens under the broad umbrella of the modern Ottoman imperial patriotism but at the same time acknowledged them as fellow victims who should be protected from imperialist aims of European powers. On the other side, the representation of these people was of *not-yet-Ottoman*, which they had missing qualities to be fully engaged as Ottoman citizens and carried on with their lives back in time that put them in a place that required imperial reform. Nowhere but Arab provinces of the empire were apparent in this sense of paradox that on the one hand, the empire sought to integrate all provinces and peoples into an official Ottomanist policy, on the other, it also temporarily segregated and ultimately racially discriminated them, which put them in an inferior status within the colonial system. The central bureaucracy of the empire accepted the Arab provinces and the subjects "as to become Ottomanized but *not-yet-Ottoman* and spatial integration of these places into the state (connected by telegraph, monuments, railways to Istanbul) laid the ground for a modernized empire."<sup>74</sup>

Harmonization of the Arab provinces with the Sublime Porte in the modernization framework uncovered another notion being conducted for centuries by the European powers in the eastern territories of the globe; which was colonialism. Deringil argued that the merging of the ideas of modernity and colonialism was a reality in the central elite, which the latter applied "as a means of survival against an increasingly hostile world."<sup>75</sup> The empire in this very framework embarked upon imitating the policy of western colonial empires within its remaining territories. Consolidating the homogeneity of the core in the empire, the

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 770-1.

<sup>75</sup> Deringil, *Ibid.*, 312.

peripheries especially the Arab provinces were pushed into the colonial status by the empire.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, designating the Ottoman imperialism or cataloging the implementations of the center as a sort of western colonialism would be a great mistake. Several differences account for the divergence of the Ottoman version of colonialism from the Western world's. Neither the motivations of the Ottomans in the colonial process nor their practices in putting the region under its hegemony exactly coincided with the Western style of the colonial system. Since the Ottomans had been in the region and ruled there for centuries, this new system did not entirely change the old management tools of the empire by making a difference in itself. Hourani depicts the empire in this sense that "the Ottomans were not to build on a *tabula rasa* that in characteristically pragmatic fashion, the 'Romans of the Muslim world' were to dip into a whole grab bag of concepts, methods and tools of statecraft, prejudices, and practices that had filtered down the ages."<sup>77</sup> Deringil depicts this Ottoman version of colonialism as a "borrowed colonialism".<sup>78</sup>

In this very context, it is reasonable to examine both the expanse and similarities-differences between the Ottoman sort of colonialism and its Western equivalence. Deringil begins with dissecting the Ottoman center in terms of its imperialist ideology thirst and existence in a time which was vastly seen as the last greatest Muslim empire to arrive at the peaks of the colonialist epoch in the latter decades of the 19th century and also to be regarded as a member of the club of Great Powers<sup>79</sup> whereas perceived as a *sick man* by them which made the Ottoman Empire unique in that sense. The bedrock and backbone of this empire was profoundly perpetuated as a way to legitimize the empire in its very existential being, the Ottoman '*borrowed colonialism*' laid its principles on the true practices of the Islamic ideal. The establishment of the Ottoman empire achieved this without comprising the Caliphate, the Sharia', Hanafi Islamic jurisprudence, guilds, and Turkish/Islamic law. On the flipside, whence superimposing the Islamic Ottoman state with the modern European side reconstructed another new type of appearance.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Deringil, *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>78</sup> Deringil, *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

This new half of the empire was a creature of the nineteenth-century positivist, Enlightenment-inspired centralizing reforms.”<sup>80</sup> In other words, the Ottoman elites used their Islamic identity within the colonial process and used this identity in the process of dominating the region and making it more loyal to itself. Furthermore, by experiencing a modernization of the West, the Ottoman Empire gained a Western empire feature both in the ideological context and the policies it applied to its provinces.

Focusing on the notion of civilization, the Ottoman gaze anchored particularly in the Arab provinces but in a different sense from the European ones. The pinpoint of this difference was the reaction of the empire against the discourse produced by the Westerners about the backwardness of the Ottoman lands compared to themselves and the endeavor of the state to fix this European-made image upon itself. Through this reaction, Islamic discourse, as Deringil underscores, was emphasized as the originality of Ottoman modernization. In this context, the Ottoman center promoted a European kind of civilization upon his provincial subjects and at the same time embraced the existence of the Ottoman image as a self-sufficient continuum towards modernity in the empire. In this framework, the Ottomanism, in other words being Ottoman, settled in the center of this Ottoman kind of colonization as a cohesive discourse whereas the acknowledgment of the distinctiveness of the center in the sense of the notion of time and spatiality with the periphery was a hyper-reality of the Ottomanism in the way of colonialism.<sup>81</sup>

Another point of departure to highlight within the distinctiveness of the Ottoman version of colonialism is the notion of time. When a colonialist met an “ignorant” native, the denial mechanism became a part of the activity and he refused the temporality between himself and this ignorant creature with the positivist and evolutionist gaze and assumed the native lived totally in a different world and

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>81</sup> Emre Can Dağlıoğlu, “Bir Şiddet Formu Olarak Osmanlı-Türk Oryantalizmi ve Araplar,” <https://stanford.academia.edu/EmreCanDaglioglu> [Accessed 15.01.2020]

different time.<sup>82</sup> This was also the case for the Ottoman Empire. The Sublime Porte was not just the imperial center standing as the dominator of the rest but at the same time temporarily highest point in the modern empire of the 19th century. In that sense, the political center conceived of its peripheries as back in time. Being associated with modernity and civilization, the center reduced its provinces to the survival or revival of a tradition ought to have been in so far as circumstances permit- expunged so as to bring the Ottoman state into modernity. As a consequence, this discourse was necessarily accompanied by a rhetoric concerned with civilization and based on the binary opposition of the civilized versus the savage (*medenî/vahşî*).<sup>83</sup>

Hence, the challenge was to close this temporal gap via *modernist* policies. The essence of the empire in its classical age has laid its basis on its representation as the orthodox Sunni dynasty superior to all other empires which the very intention was theoretically to preserve the conjuncture in this *status quo*. In this framework, the dynamic of the rule was to conserve the spatial segregation of the center with its peripheries under the ground of religious and ethnic differences among subjects. Nonetheless, the theoretical imperative of the modern Ottoman state was to broaden the horizon of modernity achieved already in the center through the tribute-paying peripheries of the empire and establish a wholly modern empire that was not yet occupied. Makdisi summarizes the very intention of the central elite that spatial integration -once objected vice versa and now desired as the ultimate object in the way of fully modern empire- was justified by and consolidated temporal segregation which the development of Ottoman orientalism can only be understood as “a fundamental break with previous notion of time and imperial organization that marked the pre-reform Ottoman Empire, when imperial rule was based on an assumption of religious and ethnic differentiation but temporal integration.”<sup>84</sup> In this context, coping with the *vernacular colonization* process, central reformers

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<sup>82</sup> Edip Gölbaşı, “19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı İmperyal Siyaseti ve Osmanlı Tarih Yazımında Kolonyal Perspektifler”, *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 13 (2011): 199-200.

<sup>83</sup> Özgür Türesay, “The Ottoman Empire Seen Through The Lens of Postcolonial Studies: A Recent Historiographical Turn,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 60, s. 2 (2013), 3.

<sup>84</sup> Makdisi, *Ibid.*, 771.

were in quest of the Ottomanization of the empire and incorporate its margins into a cohesive and uniform Ottoman modernity. To sum up Ottoman colonialist gaze on its peripheries in terms of the notion of time harmonized with the approach of the European powers. Nevertheless, the fundamental difference in this context is that the Ottoman elites contrary to its enemies did not believe the eternity of its peripheries in the sense of immutability with the developments. Georgeon clarifies that this modernist policy did not stem from the idea of the eternal, unchanging Orient, implied by European orientalism. Far from it, *Malumat*<sup>85</sup> weekly invited readers, creating an awareness about the changes being undertaken by the central powers.<sup>86</sup>

The divergence between the two poles in colonialism was also based on the motivational differences. On the one hand, the European powers laid their motivational grounds on economic impulses. However, on the other hand, the founding imperative of the Ottoman Empire in the sense of downing its peripheries into the colonial status was to bind them to the imperial center. Young clarifies succinctly by stating the fact that the “Colonialist practices were driven from economic motivations. Nevertheless, imperialism was a state policy prompted by a power project.”<sup>87</sup> In this framework, Ottoman colonialism not only became distanced from the classical understanding of the western version of colonialism but also converged with imperialism in the sense of its modernist policies. Thence, the stance of the center was “colonialism without colonies.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, both Deringil described the central policies as “borrowed colonialism” and Türesay arrived at a point of “the defensive imperialism of a state lacking the military and financial means to resist the advancement of European imperialism, a contracting empire feeling the need to struggle against expanding empires to survive”<sup>89</sup>, which more than economic motivations, the fundamental break of the Ottoman center was to establish central oriented provinces.

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<sup>85</sup> It was an Ottoman newspaper published between 1895-1903.

<sup>86</sup> Türesay, *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Türesay, *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

The very essential notion of colonialism was the mentality of superiority. The idea of superiority, of course, established several profound disparities with the peripheries who were regarded as inferior. This brought “reluctance” with itself as Osterhammel claimed, “by the colonizer to make cultural compromises to the local population.”<sup>90</sup> In that sense, the colonizer felt certain about his superiority compared to the locals and rest assured their absences on realizing a civilizational progress, the aptitude for aesthetics and abstract thinking and -above all- the ability of self-determination.”<sup>91</sup> This acceptance of the superiority of the center brought forward the question of political representation which is the point that the Ottoman Empire differed from the Western powers in terms of colonialism. Jens Hanssen questioned the possibility to imagine Indian notables occupying seats at Westminster.<sup>92</sup> This was unthinkable in the case of Western colonialism contrary to the Ottoman implementation. The issue was an actual domination of the European powers and no space for the locals for their self-representations in the political arena. A distinction between indigenous subjects and metropolitan citizens, as was the case in France, was unthinkable in the context of the Ottoman Empire. As for the Russian Empire, the question of political representation for non-Russian populations did not involve the idea of proportional representation either.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, concerning Ottoman implementation in that sense, the picture was totally different. The Ottoman imperialist approach laid its basis on the Ottoman citizenship and birthright. Once segregating the people on their confessional communities whereas now allowing all the subjects of the empire to enjoy the same political rights.

Despite the divergences between the classical sense of colonialism of the European powers and the Ottoman version of *borrowed* colonialism, many of the policies the empire managed and many discourses which were produced by the central elites of the Ottoman state closed up the gap with its adversary powers. First and foremost, the language and discourse produced to describe its subject people

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<sup>90</sup> Gölbaşı, *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Türesay, *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

were in harmony with the language of the European powers. The center ascribed the nomadic population as “uncivilized” living under the circumstances of savagery. Ottoman reformers gave the stink-eye to these “*ignorant, uncivilized and savage*”<sup>94</sup> inhabitants of the peripheries which all these representations created a clash between the suzerain and the people being under domination that corresponded to the European sense of colonialism. Şerif Mardin expresses the implication of this clash between the two poles as “The clash between nomads and urban dwellers generated the Ottoman cultivated man’s stereotype that civilization was a contest between urbanization and nomadism, and that all things nomadic were only deserving of contempt.”<sup>95</sup> Through this contempt the central elites constructed their justifications for the civilization process.

Through the notion of contempt and superiority, the central elites assumed the patriarchal attitude towards the uncivilized nomads. This attitude of the Ottoman intelligentsia approximated its context to the European colonial mentality of White Man’s Burden. It was perceived as a duty had to be undertaken by the civilized men of the state so as to harmonize them with the center. Deringil makes a connection between the Ottoman stance with “the British Raj in India where all opposition to British rule was dubbed, as by nature, ‘fanatic’ as in a ‘fanatic Moulvi’ who provoked the fanaticism of the natives”<sup>96</sup> in the sense of Ottoman constant use of civilizing motifs.<sup>97</sup> The Ottoman gaze towards its peripheries was constantly looking back and forth at that time.

In this framework, Deringil elaborates this sense of *White Man’s Burden* kind of reformist zeal of the Ottoman elites with the attitude of an Ottoman woman. Naciye Hanım (Neyyal) accompanied her husband Tevfik Bey to his duty ordered by the state in order to form a *kaza* in an Arab province and described their experience with Arabs dwelling there that:

“The fact that, although we were the *mutasarrıf*, we mingled with them as a young husband and wife. The lifestyle they shared without fanfare and

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<sup>94</sup> Gölbaşı, *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>95</sup> Deringil, *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 317-8.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

ceremony had a profound effect on us. I sensed that they liked us because, although they are savage, and live so far from civilization, they appreciate goodwill and know how to be thankful.”<sup>98</sup>

Her approach to the local settlers who welcomed and hosted them was familiar to a large extent to European assessments of the colonized people. Deringil associated Naciye Neyyal’s attitude and description towards the Arabs with British lady travelers who “praised the hospitality of ‘savage peoples’ into whose hands they entrusted their lives.”<sup>99</sup> She looked actually down upon them in terms of conforming her behavior to the local Arabs’ lifestyle. Establishing superiority through this sense of endowment put the vernacular dwellers in a status of *savagery* -that had to be civilized and modernized via the reforms and policies ordered by the center so as to be actualized with a representative already civilized- as she expressed their kindness and goodness but living so far from civilization. Describing and representing the subject peoples living in peripheries not only cast light on the contempt of the center but also unveiled the very mentality of the center harmonized with the European sense of colonialist gaze upon the colonized.

Above all the similarities and differences of the Ottoman version of colonialism with the European kind, the peculiar aspect was the national sentiment of the center in terms of its approach with the peripheries in civilization context. Involving the national background in this process, the Ottoman attitude reflected the rise of a specifically Turkish sensibility as the dominant element of a westernized Islamic Ottoman nationalism.<sup>100</sup> Ahmed Cevdet Pasha, who was one of the pioneering reformists in the time, clarified the mentality of this sentiment with his assessment that “the real strength of the Sublime State lies with the Turks. It is the obligation of their national character (*kavmiyyet*) and religion to sacrifice their lives for the House of Osman until the last one is destroyed. Therefore it is natural that they be accorded more worth than other peoples of the Sublime State.”<sup>101</sup> The implication of this kind of expression was to a large extent to bring

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 334-5.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Makdisi, *Ibid.*, 787.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

about the Turkic oriented policies and implementations so as to integrate the paying-tribute parts of the empire into the fully modernized and civilized empire. Furthermore, notwithstanding the particular attention of Abdulhamid II on the Islamic identity of the empire and the Arabs as the source of this identity in that sense. According to the orientalist discourse, which was colored with religious terms during the reign of Abdulhamid II, together with the modernizing and centralist policies of the Ottoman Empire, they gained a content that justified Turkish rule over other peoples and placed the discourse of the superiority of the Turks at the center of their policies.<sup>102</sup> Shifting the main focus from the Ottomanist sense of colonialism to Turkic oriented one exposed the local population to the national policies and mindset of the center which endeavored to keep pace with the enemies in the sense of binding them to its own empire.

Focusing on the Arab civilization and their engagement with the imperial order, the representation of the Arab lands came into real existence in the central administration. Furthermore, the modernization of the region was associated with the actual development of all the empire. In this context, François Georgeon highlights that Sultan Abdulhamid II paid particular attention to the Arab provinces and the Arab elements increased more in the central administration during this period.<sup>103</sup> The fundamental instrument in the way of increasing the loyalty of the region to the empire was clearly the Islamic identity which was more clearly expressed than the previous period and the result of a conjunctural necessity in the approach to the region.<sup>104</sup> Dağlıoğlu elaborates this approach in the time that Arab notables were placed in important positions of the Istanbul bureaucracy. Arab provinces were promoted to top positions in official registrations, and governors assigned to these regions were given higher wages.<sup>105</sup> Also, Deringil likens how the notables of the countryside keep their hearts pleasant and remain loyal to the center, compared to the British colonialism's policy of "boggling local leaders".<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Emre Can Dağlıoğlu, "Bir Şiddet Formu Olarak Osmanlı-Türk Oryantalizmi ve Araplar," <https://stanford.academia.edu/EmreCanDaglioglu> [Accessed 16.01.2020]

<sup>103</sup> Türesay, *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>104</sup> Dağlıoğlu, *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, the implication of this central focus on the Arab provinces was an enmity in the time of the Young Turk's domination. The Arab population was degraded to minority status which had to be saved from *hal-i vahşet ve bedeviyyet* (state of savagery and nomadism). Moreover, the state policy upon them shifted to a more nationalist sense of *colonization* as Makdisi claimed. Concerning this negative image of the Arabs in the eye of the Young Turks, Türesay underscores -at some point contrary to the Makdisi's claim- that "We should, therefore, take this temporary factor into consideration during the use and interpretation of narrative sources concerning the Arab provinces that date to just after the restoration of the Ottoman Constitution in July 1908."<sup>107</sup> Dağlıoğlu elaborates on the issue with a vivid example that

"The racist tone of Ottoman orientalism becomes palpable and Arabs are positioned lower than the Turkish nation in terms of linguistic, ethnic and historical aspects. In this regard, one of the founders of the CUP, İshak Sukuti, wrote in his letters to one of the important names of the CUP, Dr. Nazım Bey, expressing the words of the 'lower Muslim group that the Turks are absolutely unconnected to,' while Dr. Nazım Bey said in one of the letters he wrote to İshak Sukuti uses the term, for Arabs, 'dogs of the Turkish nation'."<sup>108</sup>

In other words, depending on the temporality of the colonization process regarding the mentality of the center, the political practices of the Ottoman Empire upon its provinces shifted from time to time which over time it gained more nationalist sense.

This rising nationalist sense of colonization was vividly seen in the Mesopotamian front. Taşköprülü Mehmed Efendi, who was an artilleryman during the Kut siege who claimed that the enemy in Mesopotamia was not only the British but also the Arabs. In his memoirs, Taşköprülü said, "Ignorant tribes did not leave any disgrace, and the tribes were punished, their villages were kept on cannon fire."<sup>109</sup> He compared the land to the enemy land. To determine its own territory as

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Ahmet Özcan, "Unutulan Cephede Unutulmayan Hatıralar: Irak ve Kut'ül-Amâre Hatıraları Üzerine Bir Deneme," *Türkiye Günlüğü Dergisi*, s. 136 (2018): 49.

enemy land, which could neither have initiatives nor authority to carry its own directives to engage in colonial activities in similar ways, like punishing the degraded and marginalized in the time of flouting supreme orders in order not to leave it to the central powers at that period were the dilemmas of the Ottoman center at this era.

Another important comment on the Arabs at this front can be seen in the letter Colonel Nurettin Bey, who was then the commander of the region, sent to the Minister of War, Enver Bey. While in his letter, Nurettin Bey expressed his resentment against the appointment of von der Goltz Pasha as an army commander to the region, he defined the Arabs as "a mass of people who rob Turkish soldiers and cooperate openly and secretly with the enemy."<sup>110</sup> It is also seen in Nurettin Pasha that, on the one hand, Turkish nationalism and superiority were accepted. On the other hand, Arabs were considered to be rebellious and devoid of feelings of nationalism, which was attributed as a traitor nation that hit Turks from behind.

One of the main problems which Ottoman elites could not deal with was the misinterpretation over the Arabs' motives in the region. Correspondence between the army commanders during the war reveals this situation. "The British increased their strength in the region in terms of weapons, equipment and personnel by establishing close relations with the tribal chief sheikhs on the land where they were deployed to Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar."<sup>111</sup> Süleyman Nazif Bey, who was the governor of Mosul at the time, reminded that he would not trust the tribal chiefs in the Persian Gulf, in a letter he sent to the Iraqi Commander Cavit Pasha on August 4, 1914, and stated that there was neither religious effort nor nationality dignity in these sheikhs who were with the British."<sup>112</sup> On April 12, 1915, Suleyman Askeri Bey launched an attack against the British forces from the Euphrates Basin to seize Basra, but failed to succeed and committed suicide two days after the attack when he was traumatized and could not comprehend how he let himself down. From Türkmen's point of view, "The defeat was the result of the lack of discipline, lack

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<sup>110</sup> Türkmen, *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>112</sup> Türkmen, *Ibid.*, 31.

of education, and failure to act as planned, with units mostly composed of indigenous people and tribes who always supported the one with the highest bid and in this case, were on the side of the British because they paid more money within a short time.”<sup>113</sup> Arabs were accused of attributing a substance, not in a relationship of interest. The main problem here is that while Governor of Bagdat Süleyman Nazif expressed his distrust on the Arab sheiks, he made them essentially unreliable rather than focusing on their relations of interest. Furthermore, the victory, if it were, was more likely to be attributed to the Turkish commander, who provided discipline and training, not to the Arab success.

The Ottoman policy of reconquering its own provinces and countering with the local elites, which raised there with state devices against the enemy, strikingly reflect the Ottoman colonization of the period. In that sense, one of the striking examples of the colonization of the Ottoman Empire in the process of creating a loyal subject in the Arab region is Ali Jawdat, graduated from the Baghdad military school and after graduating from the Harbiye military academy in Istanbul, took his post in the Ottoman army. “He had grown disenchanted with the Young Turk government and, like many educated elites in the Arab provinces, aspired to greater Arab autonomy within a reformed Ottoman state rather than outright independence for fear of European colonial domination.”<sup>114</sup> Ali Jawdat was a native of Mosul and a soldier in the Ottoman army against the British advance, along with Suleyman Askeri Bey, in the Nasiriye region in early July. Jawdat Bey, who took command after the suicide of Askeri Bey after the defeat of Shaibe, entered Nasiriye in defense position by getting support from Bedouins and providing them with the necessary equipment. However, upon Gorrings's attack, Ottoman soldiers remained between the British and Bedouin fire after the Bedouins changed their positions which “Jawdat was himself ambushed by Bedouin tribesmen, who disarmed and robbed him before he was captured by the British in the village of Suq al-Shuyukh, near Nasiriyya.”<sup>115</sup> This is exactly the dilemma that the Ottoman rulers experienced

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>114</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

in the region. On the one hand, the Ottoman center tried to connect local elements to their imperial order through the educational policy and re-conquest strategy, on the other, it had to cope with his own subjects, which the European powers instigated and won them round themselves with the colonial activities in the region. It was precisely for this reason that the Ottoman elites drew a more negative image on the region and took a more colonialist stance.

Under these circumstances and in this framework, the Ottoman center wished to re-conquer the Arab lands to establish a local defense against the European enemies in the region. Nevertheless, the result was not in favor. For example, in the battle of Shaibe, which took place on December 7, 1914 near Basra, the telegram, which stated that the Amare Tribe could not be used, shows the policy of reconquering of the periphery, in the way of the Ottoman colonization, and, if not, the superior accused of the lower. In the telegram after the battle, Cavit Pasha stated that the “tribal soldiers remained a spectator in the battle and, in turn, robbed the arms and ammunition of Turkish soldiers. The tribes here will not be trusted until support comes from Istanbul.”<sup>116</sup> The Ottoman center attempted to re-conquer its own provinces through political and military means but blamed the natives in otherwise.

In these conflicts that have been going on for years in the region, it is necessary to see the constant change of sides of the Arabs in interest relations that they took the side which was more beneficial to them. For example at the Battle of Ctesiphon in late November, “it was partly the action of Arab horsemen on his desert flank that compelled Townshend to retreat to Kut.”<sup>117</sup> However, when the course of the war changed, most of the tribes went to the British side. But “the shift of allegiance was but a veneer as most Iraqis were loyal to their own interests, not to any imperial power.”<sup>118</sup> To attribute the hypocrisy and betrayal of the people of the region was the result of a colonialist approach, although the Ottoman regional experiences were also effective. One should not ignore the relations of interest in this discourse.

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<sup>116</sup> Dh. Şfr 452/99, 7 Aralık 1914.

<sup>117</sup> Faulkner, *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

The Ottoman elites also attributed a romantic past to the world where the Arabs lived. Mehmed Emin describes the region as follows:

“In this fertile and wide area, appearing as a desert, there was a bright civilization and a high level of welfare and urbanization that inspired the ambition to acquire property that guided the old western tribes. In the current situation, there are a number of desert tribes that are living a primitive life and misery deprived of all kinds of life and civilization.”<sup>119</sup>

In this respect, the Ottoman elites have added to the mentality of exoticness that Europeans have placed on the East and approached the discourse that this region is in dire need of civilization that is more advanced than itself with the discourse of restoring its former glory as Europeans once did. The Ottomans must have saved the geography as the superior power of the region by bringing civilization from these ignorant and backward Arabs as of their current situation.

In this context, Abidin Ege's, who was a reserve officer in Baghdad then depicts the region as equally remarkable. Speaking of the use of the Tigris River as a water source, he wrote that:

“man would swear not to drink any more water in his life if he saw the people drinking water here. As the river flowed like mud, one was washing clothes on the edge and the other was peeing. In addition, the sewers and dirt of the whole city were poured into the Tigris. Right next to it, all the people of Baghdad were indifferently filling this dirty water and transporting it to their homes.”<sup>120</sup>

Abidin Ege's depiction ignores geographical conditions and cultural behaviors as Özcan finds it exaggerated. Ege has ignored the daily life realities influenced by the regional culture, with an orientalist perspective on it. The negative language used in the depiction of the region also influenced the narrative on the use of water and revealed the colonizer superiority mind of an Ottoman elite at that time.

The experiences of the Ottomans in this region for decades were reflected precisely around Kut. When it was understood that Kut could not be saved anymore and delivery to Halil Pasha was essential, the negotiations started and the fate of the

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<sup>119</sup> Özcan, *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

people of the region was a matter of concern. Herbert sitting at the table representing the British said: “the Arabs with Townshend had done what weak people always do:... because they feared him, they had given him their service.”<sup>121</sup>

Halil Pasha ended the discussion about the situation of the Arabs, claiming that this would concern the Ottoman Empire. Both the experiences in the region for decades and what happened during the Kut siege explain the decisions of Halil Pasha after entering Kut. A Reverend Spooner and an officer in the British army summarize what happened, after the surrender, to the people of the region who were suspected of cooperating with the British that “they were hanged on tripod gallows, left to be slowly strangled to death, half of the town’s inhabitants had been shot or hanged, and the trees were dangling with corpses.”<sup>122</sup> The local people whom the Ottoman elites could not put into the imperial order and accused of betrayal would see either mercy or punishment, and the experiences of the Ottomans led to the second one.

This Ottoman colonial attitude was seen not only on the Arabs of the region but also on the Indian soldiers captured in the Mesopotamian front during the First World War. There were obvious differences in the Ottoman approach to the captured Indian and British soldiers. The European White Man, regarded as modern and civil and exemplified in the practices in the way of the modernization process in the empire made up to this time, was held superior to the Indian soldiers he colonized. In the eyes of the Ottoman center, Europe was the standard to be reached, and despite the nationalist arguments, the Indians who were captured on this front compared to the European were held down and treated accordingly. What happened in Kut and Halil Pasha's discourse and practices is proof that the Ottoman elites had a colonial attitude other than the way to modernize the empire. What really happened to the Indian prisoners after they were captured?

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<sup>121</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

## 2.2. BRITISH COLONIAL EYES

Folk poet Aşık Veysel interrogates the notion of fortune in his life in the sense of how it brought him to a point where he cannot intervene in the flow of the events. He feels the pressure of this inevitability and resigns himself to this *çarka devran*.<sup>123</sup> The interrogation of fate and the role of human agency taken into account by Aşık Veysel has been a long debate in philosophy and history. It has been queried about man's ability to influence the events around him. On the other hand, if this is true, the other question arises about who keeps this power of action mechanism in his hands. The inquiry has never reached a certain point that gives a precise answer to those questions. On the contrary, it has generated new debates. In history, apart from the question of the role of human agency, it has been debated about whom agency influences during the course of history.

“It is that insofar as the academic discourse of history-that is, ‘history’ as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university-is concerned, ‘Europe’ remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call ‘Indian,’ ‘Chinese,’ ‘Kenyan,’ and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called ‘the history of Europe’.”<sup>124</sup>

As Chakrabarty summarizes the history, in general, was under European domination and the ones who were not European became the object of the history of Europe. In classical colonialism, on the one hand, there is a modern and civilized side, on the other, there is a backward, non-modern and uncivilized side. The primary task of the modern side was to bring enlightenment to the uncivilized. The colonization process was grounded in this discourse. Indeed, this discourse became a cover for the real intention. Faulkner claims that there are two different methods in this colonization. To him, the difference arose over whether the imperial mission involved teaching ‘civilisation’ (the French view) or ‘respecting

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<sup>123</sup> It can be translated as fate, destiny, status quo or a system that cannot be interfered.

<sup>124</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?* (California: University of California Press, 1992), 1.

native traditions' (the British view).<sup>125</sup> He says that there were two ways within the British style. One was that "the natives were beyond hope: mere racial inferiors who could never aspire to European standards. Alternatively, they might be seen as following their own pathway to independent nationhood, the imperial power acting as guardian and facilitator of this journey."<sup>126</sup> But in both these ways, the British colonial system was very problematic because there is a paradox brought by colonization. The colonizer, on the one hand, wanted to protect and sustain his interests in the lands he invaded. On the other hand, he promised to develop the colonized to his level. Thus, the colonized ones would then be able to manage themselves. Nevertheless, the colonizer had never any intention of allowing the colonized to establish its own administration which acts against the interests of the colonizer. All in all, claiming that the colonizer paves the way for independent nationhood for the colonized was a paradox of the colonization. The most striking aspect of colonialism is that this whole process has proceeded only in the interests of the colonizer. The discourse of the civilizing mission was merely a supremacist mechanism.

The modernist and colonialist attitude contains absences in many concepts that the modern world order considers essential. Chakrabarty addresses "freedom" among these concepts. "Freedom" undergoes many fundamental changes in societies and cultures, conceptually and even within the practices, it has been implemented. Chakrabarty defines freedom in the west "to do as one pleased, the right to self-indulgence while in India the freedom from the ego, the capacity to serve and obey voluntarily."<sup>127</sup> In this context, he illustrates how freedom and slavery have changed in different concepts:

"To be able to subordinate oneself to others and to dharma (duty/moral order/proper action) ... to free the soul from the slavery of the senses, are the first tasks of human freedom... That is why in Indian families boys and girls are subordinate to the parents, wife to the husband and to the parents-in-law, the disciple to the guru, the student to the teacher ... the king to

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<sup>125</sup> Faulkner, *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Chakrabarty, *Ibid.*, 14.

dharma ... the people to the king, (and one's) dignity and prestige to (that of) the community (samaj).”<sup>128</sup>

Concepts and notions may change within cultures. To Chakrabarty, freedom within Indian culture differs greatly from the meaning imposed by modernist and colonialist Europe. It can even be replaced conceptually with slavery, which is the opposite of freedom. Described as the third world country by modern Europe, freedom is considered in India as the result of subordination to others on the road to freeing the soul from slavery.

One of the main problems of the colonial view is to deal with non-Europeans with their deficiency and ignorance. Furthermore, this was done not only by the Europeans but also by the locals. Chakrabarty reveals Sarkar's discourse in this sense. Sarkar has addressed the victory of India over the colonial system and the process of establishing the nation-state. He stated that

“The sixty years or so that lie between the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and the achievement of independence in August 1947 witnessed perhaps the greatest transition in our country's long history. A transition, however, which in many ways remains grievously incomplete, and it is with this central ambiguity that it seems most convenient to begin our survey.”<sup>129</sup>

Chakrabarty perceives of Sarkar's approach to the Indian transition as “neither the peasant's dream of a mythical and just kingdom nor the Left's ideal of a socialist revolution nor a ‘complete bourgeois transformation’-it is within these three absences these ‘grievously incomplete’ scenarios that Sarkar locates the story of modern India.”<sup>130</sup> Sarkar characterizes the victory over colonialism and the formation of the nation-state as the biggest change in the history of India. Furthermore, he deals with these processes from a colonial perspective.

Apart from lacks and absences, the West has always attributed immunity to the East. This was an inseparable part of its domination. Throughout this process, “the East has a character that is ‘passive, not involved in anything, has only

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

historical characteristics - which Europe has become the dominant power in the writing of its own history, has not been able to decide on himself, is inactive and is not autonomous."<sup>131</sup> The West has always attributed an essence characterizing the East. In this way, the east was reshaped before it was discovered.<sup>132</sup> And over time, just as the Ottoman elites imitate in its own provincial, the modern colonialist West has put the East in the position of an object to be shaped from the object to be investigated.<sup>133</sup> The argument produced by Edward Said in this context connects knowledge to this hegemonic relationship. According to him, what constitutes the basis of this hegemony is that "the West has knowledge of the unchanging Oriental essence, and this knowledge gives the West the belief that it is superior to the East and the authority to govern it."<sup>134</sup> In this way, the West had both established its superiority and created the legitimacy for its hegemony. By adding knowledge to this hegemonic relationship, both Said and Foucault explained the creation of an unchanging East. Also, they illuminated how the West existed both physically and invisibly. The West first created an East and then formed its own authority. Eventually, the East had to include this domination even in its most private life without even realizing it.

In Eastern societies, as Chakrabarty constitutes in the case of India, the narrative of private life is not very visible. He clarifies that "our autobiographies are remarkably 'public' when written by men. Nirad Chaudhuri spends on describing the experience of his wedding night in the second volume of his celebrated and prize-winning autobiography is as good an example as any other and is worth quoting at some length."<sup>135</sup>

"I was terribly uneasy at the prospect of meeting as wife a girl who was a complete stranger to me, and when she was brought in ... and left standing before me I had nothing to say. I saw only a very shy smile on her face, and timidly she came and sat by my side on the edge of the bed. I do not know how after that both of us drifted to the pillows, to lie down side by

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<sup>131</sup> Emre Can Dağlıoğlu, "Bir Şiddet Formu Olarak Osmanlı-Türk Oryantalizmi ve Araplar," <https://stanford.academia.edu/EmreCanDaglioglu> [Accessed 11.02.2020]

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

side. [Chaudhuri adds in a footnote: "Of course, fully dressed. We Hindus ... consider both extremes-fully clad and fully nude-to be modest, and everything in between as grossly immodest. No decent man wants his wife to be an allumeuse." ] Then the first words were exchanged. She took up one of my arms, felt it and said: "You are so thin. I shall take good care of you." I did not thank her, and I do not remember that beyond noting the words I even felt touched. The horrible suspense about European music had reawakened in my mind, and I decided to make a clean breast of it at once and look the sacrifice, if it was called for, straight in the face and begin romance on such terms as were offered to me. I asked her timidly after a while: "Have you listened to any European music?" She shook her head to say "No." Nonetheless, I took another chance and this time asked: "Have you heard the name of a man called Beethoven?" She nodded and signified "Yes." I was reassured, but not wholly satisfied. So I asked yet again: "Can you spell the name?" She said slowly: "B, E, E, T, H, O, V, E, N." I felt very encouraged ... and [we] dozed off."<sup>136</sup>

As can be seen in this example given by Chakrabarty, a colonialist power can penetrate all areas of life, but this does not have to be with *force*. This power project creates a new dialect, which is that "the relationship between the ruler and the ruled through pressure and physical violence, which is directly related to the 'force', evolves into another form in which the ruler aims to control and regulate the life and population movements of the ruled."<sup>137</sup> Within this framework, as can be seen in the example of Chaudhuri, even in the most private life, modern colonialist power made itself be felt very strongly without force. The ruling class created a relationship between knowledge and power by drawing the boundaries of true knowledge. It was precisely in this way that modern colonialist power succeeded in establishing authority over societies without physically existing.

Another indicator of British colonization and mentality in this context was the recruiting strategy for the army from the Indian dominion. British wanted to choose those who had the military aptitude for the army. The British mind in this sense was that in organizing their Indian forces, it reinforced such martial class demarcations by assigning recruits from specific ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups such as Gurkhas, Sikhs, and Rajputs' to homogenous companies and even

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<sup>136</sup> Chakrabarty, *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

regiments.<sup>138</sup> By putting these people into a homogeneous group, it made the control mechanism effective in the army. “Emphasizing such group distinctions mitigated the potential for uprising, as the distinctive religious practices, dietary restrictions and religious ceremonies of homogeneously constructed regiments fostered separate and cohesive identities.”<sup>139</sup> In this practice, the British created a colonial rule that was based on force. However, this strategy did not bring success to the British in Mesopotamia.

British policy of training and grouping soldiers based on races could be observed in the letters of Sisir Sarbadhikari, who belonged to a middle-class Bengali Hindu family in Kolkata and was in the army of Kut. Amitav Ghosh claims that he was not suitable for the British army at the time. To British colonialism, not all races earned the right to be part of the military and unfortunately for Sisir, he automatically wasn't eligible to join the army.

“For in the early years of the twentieth century the chances that a young man from such a background would find his way into the front lines of a military campaign were close to nil. This is because Bengalis were not eligible for recruitment into the British Empire's Indian army, which drew its soldiers (or sepoys) from certain specially designated ‘races’.”<sup>140</sup>

Military service was available only to certain groups and occupied an important place in the colonial system. Military service was an important chance for the locals to bring them to a high position in the system. In this regard, when the British needed human power at such a critical time, “some prominent Bengalis decided that the army's medical services might be a means of furthering their claims to serve in the ranks of the regular military.”<sup>141</sup> As a result, they were not rejected. The problem is that British colonialism both sub-divided the indigenous Indians essentially and made them accept this situation of racist compartmentalization. Eventually, the

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<sup>138</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>139</sup> Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *A Land Of Aching Hearts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 207.

<sup>140</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *Shared Sorrows: Indians and Armenians in the prison camps of Ras al-‘Ain, 1916-18*, 2.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

system caused these inferior locals to see joining the army in British hegemony as a chance.<sup>142</sup>

One indication of the British colonialism in Mesopotamia was that it did not feature the local people in the regional administration. A letter from Captain Lawrence of British intelligence to *The Times* clearly addresses this point. He sheds light on the British administrative approach to the locals after the invasion of Iraq.

“The government we have set up is English in fashion, and is conducted in the English language. So it has 450 British executive officers running it and not a single responsible Mesopotamian. In Turkish days, 70 percent of the executive civil service was local. Our 80,000 troops there are occupied in police duties, not in guarding the frontiers. They are holding down the people. In Turkish days, the two army corps in Mesopotamia were 60 percent Arab in officers, 95 per cent in other ranks.”<sup>143</sup>

As clearly seen in the letter, the region has been reduced to an inferior status. British colonization, unlike the Ottoman colonization mentality in the region, excluded the local people from the very first moment. On the other hand, Faulkner took a different stance on the British attempt in terms of dominating the region and brought a different explanation. He admitted that this occupation of the region was based on imperialist ambitions and said that racial exclusion and military oppression were the basis of these ambitions. What he added is that

“The problem was not simply the deeply ingrained assumptions of racial superiority imported from India along with the baggage and batmen of the white officer caste. Memory of the Mutiny weighed on the minds of the Anglo- Indian elite as a nightmare. They feared nationalist and jihadist revolt above all else, and in consequence, viewed with deep suspicion even the most minimal proposals for the advancement of native people to a role in government.”<sup>144</sup>

British intended to eliminate all possible dangers for the colonization process from the very beginning. The language which dominated the discourse which was established and the class which held management tools were completely in service

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Faulkner, *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

to this process. All measures have been taken and all possible obstacles have been wanted to be removed.

British implemented a colonial policy to attract the Indian population to its side while actually having different intentions in mind. After the Ottoman participation in the war alongside Germany, it made a statement to the people that:

“In view of the outbreak of war between Great Britain and Turkey, which, to the regret of Great Britain, has been brought about by the ill-advised, unprovoked and deliberate action of the Ottoman Government, his Excellence the Viceroy is authorized by His Majesty’s Government to make the following public announcement in regard to the Holy Places of Arabia, including the Holy Shrines of Mesopotamia and the port of Jeddah, in order that there may be no misunderstanding on the part of His Majesty’s most loyal Moslem subjects as to the attitude of His Majesty’s Government in this war, in which no question of a religious character is involved. These Holy Places and Jeddah will be immune from attack or molestation by the British naval and military forces so long as there is no interference with pilgrims from India to the Holy Places and shrines in question. At the request of his Majesty’s Government the Governments of France and Russia have given similar assurances.”<sup>145</sup>

Since they were afraid that the Ottoman Empire would try to lure the Muslim population in the British colony and gain an advantage over being the co-religionist with the Indian Muslims, the British pursued a manipulative policy towards its colonial settings. These Muslim Indians trained a great deal of the British army in the war, especially in Mesopotamian front. Apart from gaining sympathy over religion, it tried to attract local people to its own side through feelings of dignity and honor. Fawaz exemplifies the issue with a newspaper that Bombay’s *Jame-e-Jamshad*, propagandized. “This is the time when India should deem it to be her duty to show to the world how ready and willing she is to make any sacrifice she can in men and treasure, for the defense and assertion of her honour and dignity.”<sup>146</sup> Gathering people without any cultural, linguistic, religious or historical affiliation with itself, around its imperialistic ambitions was exactly the indication of the fact of colonization. Exploiting manpower from a colony to extort another place and make there a colony is the truth of colonization.

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<sup>145</sup> Fawaz, *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

Precisely in this context, the British pursued its strategy of embracing patriotic sentiment on religious emotion over the Indian colony. British have succeeded in this strategy. Indigenous Muslim Indians were convinced about going to war against a Muslim country and thereby produced their own discourses. Fawaz presents the statement of Ayesha Jelal, an anti-colonialist nationalist historian, as a striking example in this regard that “An emotional affinity toward the Ummah had never kept Muslims from identifying with patriotic sentiments in their own homelands.”<sup>147</sup> Nationalism and loyalty to the superior colonizer overshadowed the natives’ religious affinities. Creating this commitment and mentality was a success for British colonization. Linking a colonized society to itself with nationalist feelings - which is impossible to speak of a national union - was a great indication of how this process penetrated so deep into the society. Another striking example in this sense emerges in the letter written by a soldier to his family that no there is not a better occasion to prove the loyalty of my family to the British government. Verily, “Turkey is a Muslim power, but what has it to do with us? Turkey is nothing at all to us.”<sup>148</sup> The important point here is that this soldier needed to prove his loyalty to the British. While he could not find something in common with Turkey, although he shared the same religious beliefs, he felt a commitment in a nationalist sense to the one who colonized him. Another soldier from Punjab reveals another aspect of this process, as he explained to his friend:

“Remember this, that you must always do the Sirkar’s work faithfully. It is very difficult to get such a King. The Turks are not our paternal uncle’s children! I firmly rely on you, that you remain the well-wisher of the Sirkar. Still, it is proper that I should advise you. The Turks made war against our Sirkar without any cause. Our Sirkar repeatedly told the Turks before the war to remain neutral, and that their security would be arranged for in every way. But the Turks would not be advised, and now they are giving away their country with their own hands.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

Sirkar means “the state” here, and the state was the British colonizer state. It is one of the most obvious examples of British colonization in India that a soldier absorbed a colonizer as such and saw it as his own state. Furthermore, he participated in a war for the sake of the colonizer, to prove his commitment and with nationalist feelings, though he had no national bound, historically. In this context, for the Indian soldiers, the patriotic sentiment prevailed over religious affinities.

Another aspect was to involve political discourse in the process. For Muslim sepoys, it was not easy to fight against a Muslim state. To facilitate the situation and ease the emotional anxieties some discourses needed to be produced. In this context, they stripped the war from a religious war discourse and turned it into a war in which political interests clashed. The war that Turkey was fighting was political and that while the Indian Muslims had some religious ties with the Sultan Caliph, they were by no means bound to treat their political interest as identical with that of Turkey<sup>150</sup> was stated by Mazharul Haq who was one of the pan-Islamists in India and contextualized Islam within the political state. Again in the same discourse, the members of Delhi ulema announced the following:

“We and the Turk have a spiritual relation with each other. The religious duties that are binding on us are binding on them, but their material responsibilities and ours are quite different. They have their own political needs just as we have ours. At the same time it should be borne in mind that our material responsibilities, which relate to India and the British Government, are not only material, but moral and to a certain extent religious.”<sup>151</sup>

They brought material interests to the fore by pulling the subject out of religion without denying religious ties with the Ottoman side. The important point is that colonization was not only exploiting the loot below and above a region. It was also raising a mentality just as indigenous Indian Muslims justified their entry to the war with a discourse that left the religion out of context.

Apart from Indians, local Arabs were one of the main targets in the ongoing wars in Iraq, especially during the siege of Kut. The British, who came to create a

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

colonial order around the modernizing discourse and the intention of rescuing them from Ottoman bullying, was an extra burden to the locals. General Townshend, who was the commander of the British army and came to an unfamiliar area with an occupying position, showed the reality of this colonial system. In his memoirs, Townshend states that it was the indigenous Arabs that worried him the most and that he suspected that they cooperated with the enemy, which was the Ottoman Empire. Townshend says in his memories that it was certain that the situation would be serious if the enemy instigated city people to revolt at night, so I detained the notables and declared that I would shoot them at the slightest betrayal.<sup>152</sup> Townshend's practice would have been legitimate in terms of military ethics. But without action by the public, such a decision is open to debate to what extent it is consistent within the civil framework and within the discourse that I am here for the benefit of the public. Also, Townshend's use of the concept of betrayal is problematic since there was no link between them and there was no agreement. In reality, it invalidated this concept. The perception of betrayal was actually an extension of the creation of superiority. The result was considering it a betrayal if the inferior was not with him because it was really legitimate to see the inferiors' loyalty in the colonial system. In early April 1916, Townshend demanded that there was no money in his treasure and that the soldiers needed their salaries to meet their needs - tea, tobacco, etc. - and money would come for it. He also said that the Arabs did not accept paper money and received an extra rupee to break the ten rupees. Townshend's response to this attempt by the locals to protect their interests in this war which they did not know when it would end was that: "Executing them by firing squad and thus aligning them for making an example for the others."<sup>153</sup> In this context, how the British colonialism entered the Arab geography was exposed.

In the light of Townshend's approach, it is clearly seen as the extent of violence in the Mesopotamian front. The Western colonial processes of creating and shaping the East brings *violence* intrinsically with itself. According to Said, the East finds itself a living space within the categories, concepts, and codification that

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<sup>152</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, 404.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 548.

the West builds upon it. The colonized people also adopt and use these concepts and categories, each time leading to their reproduction as a 'symbolic and incomplete object'. Even if this situation does not lead to physical violence, while there is always the possibility of physical violence, it causes a 'symbolic violence'.<sup>154</sup> Within this context, it leads to 'violence of essentialism', a misidentification that classifies the East with an essence containing unhistorical categories and labels, which is at the heart of Said's argument.<sup>155</sup> Essentialist violence denies that the East exists at the same time and place as the West and creates a process that makes the West superior which Dağlıoğlu claims that this will necessarily bring violence. Another violence found in symbolic violence is the epistemic violence defined by Spivak that the information containing the scientific concepts and categories produced by the West prevent and destroy local information ."<sup>156</sup> Dağlıoğlu defines this as a "silencing policy"<sup>157</sup> that reinforces hegemonic relations. With these forms of violence, the West has made the East invariable object and prevented its hegemony from being changed as Spivak claimed. It seems clear that colonization is intrinsic to violence and does not hesitate to expose violence to establish its hegemony. In this context, Townshend did not hesitate to bring violence into effect on the locals.

One of the most important points of the colonization process was that it melted violence and compromise in the same pot. On the one hand, the British created an army to colonize a place. On the other hand, they applied this colonial process with those it had already colonized. It turned the colonized into a colonizer within its structure. The observations and expressions of Agent Captain Lawrence in Mesopotamia shed light on this multi-layered British colonialism. When Lawrence was in Iraq, he was shocked by the actions of the Anglo-Indian army officers both to local personnel within the army and to the local Arabs in the region. Faulkner found the implication of Lawrence's judgment that it was

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<sup>154</sup> Dağlıoğlu, *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

“A fatal weakness that the Anglo- Indian Army made no attempt to win hearts and minds. Cooperation with the Arabs was not the way of the directing parties there and till the end of the war the British in Mesopotamia remained substantially an alien force invading enemy territory with the local people passively neutral or sullenly against them.”<sup>158</sup>

The discourse created at this point reveals the British mindset. The extension of the mistakes for Lawrence was falling in a position from being indigenous to being foreign here. The British ought not to be a passive onlooker but an active component of the region where it wants to establish its hegemony. Just as in the letters of Indian soldiers, the British were regarded as a state in which the locals had patriotic sentiments and loyalty. It should not be perceived as a stranger in the new destination. In terms of Lawrence's discourse not only did the British re-colonize the Indians within its army but also used these people while preparing for the same colonial process for the new destination.

One of the worst characteristics of colonial mentality was that the colonizer imposes the worst course or the negativities to the group it regards as inferior to him. On the Iraqi front, this group was the Indian military men. Townshend, who retired to Kut after the defeat of Ctesiphon immediately began to accuse Indian soldiers. Townshend claimed that “while his British troops were able to work on 4 December 1915, the Indians laydown and could do nothing but sleep and eat for two days!”<sup>159</sup> This was precisely the result of a colonial approach. Never to give a share of the defeat to him as he considered his victory as his own success. However, Gardner interprets the event in a different manner. According to Gardner, the fatigue of Indian soldiers had no significant effect on the delay in taking the defensive position or establishing the necessary defensive constructions. To him, what actually happened was that on December 5th

“Townshend was having second thoughts about remaining in Kut. It is therefore likely that he did not direct the bulk of his forces to start building defensive positions until after Nixon rejected his appeal to retire Ali

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<sup>158</sup> Faulkner, *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>159</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 72.

Gharbi on the 6th. By this point, the approach of Nurettin's army made the construction of defenses a matter of some urgency."<sup>160</sup>

Actually, Townshend had been in a doubt about standing at Kut and had not yet decided to take a full defensive position there against the Ottoman side. On the decision from Nixon, Kut was determined as the last point of rearguard action and the last line of defense. But Townshend, who was absolutely in defense psychology wanted to justify himself and make someone responsible for the bad trend and as always the colonized was chosen as the scapegoat.

In this context, the mentality that comes with the colonization process also manifests itself. Aimé Césaire explains in his article that

“Wherever colonizers and the colonized meet vis-a- vis, I see the hasty manufacture of a few thousand subordinate public servant. Boys, artisans, and office clerks. Between the colonizer and colonized there is room for only one forced labor; pressure, compulsory crops (and so on). No human contact but relation of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into an army sergeant and the indigenous man into an instrument of production.”<sup>161</sup>

At a point that has not yet been determined as the final route of the troops, Townshend's approach fits in this context. Colonization turns into reification. As a result, Indian soldiers fall into the position of being the only criminal in the eyes of a superior European man.

Right within this context of not accepting the failure on behalf, Townshend saw the Ottoman victory thanks to the German supervision since he could not acknowledge being defeated by a non-European mind. Based on colonial mentality, it was hard to imagine for the eastern societies to achieve success on their own, without a European power or mind above them. If these eastern societies cooperated with a Western society other than those who colonized them, this success was seen as compensation for Western power. This mentality was also applied to the Ottoman side on the Mesopotamian front, although it was not colonized and also recognized

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Aimé Césaire, “Discourse on Colonialism,” in *Nations and Identities*, ed. Vincent Pecora (Massachusetts:Blackwell Publisher, 2001), 258.

as having an independent language, religion and cultural heritage outside the West. During the siege of Kut, the British side organized a series of operations aimed at rescuing General Townshend and his soldiers. Meanwhile, Mister Edmund Candler, who was a war reporter of Morning Post, along with British soldiers in Iraq, sent a letter from Basra to London describing the status of the operations and was published in the newspaper on February 7, 1916. In the letter, he talks about the weather and ground conditions, then in the region, the condition of the soldiers, and the failed relief operation. The main point is his argument, which is not inconspicuous at first glance but shows the colonial European mentality in a careful reading, as the basis for this failure. Candler says in the letter: "Here, our soldier is fighting heroically despite the strong trenches of the Turks under the German supervision and the unfavorable conditions of the land."<sup>162</sup> (*"İşte askerimiz Türklerin Alman nezareti altında tertip eyledikleri vesâit-i tedâfüiyye-i mâhirâneye inzımm eden müşkilât-ı tabiiyye-i arziyyeye rağmen can-siperâne ve kahramanâne bir suretle harp etmektedirler."*<sup>163</sup>) The superior white mind stated that the eastern soldiers and the commander alone could not achieve this success. However, as of January 10, 1916, Halil Pasha was appointed as the Commander of Iraq and became the authorized person in the region and the decisions taken against the relief operations with the siege were implemented with his approval. Although German Commander Field Marshall Goltz had a superior authority in the region, he did not intervene in the field very much and was not effective in combat since he was mostly interested in the Iran region. However, while colonialist logic rested on the idea of creating this sub-status and that those with this status would not be effective on their own, it also brought such an attitude towards the world and interpreting events in this context.

We can clearly see the extension of the colonial system and mentality during the siege of Kut in the Anglo-Indian army. In the memories of General Townshend, who was here as the army commander and responsible for the soldiers' survival there, we witness how this logic of colonialism reduced the Indians into the lower

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<sup>162</sup> Koçak, *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

status which needed the supervision of the superior white man. At this point, Townshend complained about the lack of sufficient amounts of white men at the head of the Indians. British officers were cited in Townshend war memoir as one of the heavy casualties inflicted in Indian troops during the Battle of Ctesiphon. The main problem here is that Townshend stated that there were also many losses of Indian officers, but for Townshend, the main thing that endangered the army here was that the British officers had decreased.<sup>164</sup> An argument that Townshend did not trouble deceased Indians is absolutely wrong because every soldier in Kut was essential for the defense. However, it is a fact that the British were more important. The main issue here is that British soldiers were *primus inter pares* in the army and the extension of that was to down Indian soldiers into an inferior status.

In this context, Townshend who was also responsible for the Indian soldiers became more evident in the mid-April memoirs towards the end of the siege. In his memoirs, during this period, when the food shortage peaked, he pointed out that the British were very strong, determined and brave, Townshend says "not so to the Indians."<sup>165</sup> He describes British soldiers as the most reliable soldiers he can lean and fall back on without hesitation. Townshend accepts there were exceptions among Indian soldiers, but he says that by the end of the siege, British soldiers had no confidence in Indian soldiers. In such an environment, it was necessary to think about the safety of the Indian soldiers.

One of the most important problems is that Townshend says that "this is not actually the fault of the Indians. They are not able to withstand disasters by their nature, they cannot manage to face disasters like Europeans."<sup>166</sup> It should not be overlooked that during this time, there was an acute shortage of cereal and vegetable supplies and that Indians avoided eating meat due to their cultural and religious beliefs. The main problem is that the army commander himself went to a categorization within his soldiers and we see how colonial mentality penetrated within the army. In this context, it is clearly seen how Indian soldiers were

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<sup>164</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 567.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 568.

colonized both in the civilian and military fields and how they eventually crumbled in this system within the war environment.

### CHAPTER 3: ALIEN TO ALL

The Mesopotamian front was one of the most severe fronts in WWI. The Ottoman Empire did not want to lose its hegemony that had lasted for centuries in the region. Besides, the defeat on this front was to endanger the Ottoman lands behind the area. The British side wanted to make up for the defeat in Gallipoli but most importantly, it wanted to seize oil, the most valuable thing of the period, in the region. For these ambitions, the British launched its operations in Iraq and dispatched soldiers from its colonies. The most important of those was the Indian colony.

In the beginning, the British did not want to use Indian soldiers in the war. As a European power, the British thought that if a colony is able to kill whites this would mar its image. Vedica Kant summarizes the mindset in this sense that: “The British were concerned about upholding ‘white prestige’... Having Indians kill white men in the battlefield could after all, potentially upset the strict racial hierarchies and threaten the colonial machinery.”<sup>167</sup> But in times of war, ideologies were overshadowed by necessities. Thus, the decision was made to involve the Indian soldiers in the war by the British War Council as early as 5 August 1914.<sup>168</sup>

For the Indian soldiers, the most important and troublesome front throughout the entire war would be the Iraqi front. 588,717 Indians, nearly 40 percent of all Indians who were involved in the war, served in Mesopotamia more than any other single campaign during the war.<sup>169</sup> Those at the disposal of General Townshend were three Indian battalions, an additional infantry brigade, three regiments of Indian cavalry, a battalion of Indian Pioneers, three companies of Indian Sappers and Miners. In the fall of 1915 Indian personnel made up approximately 78 percent of the Townshend’s military force.<sup>170</sup> However, these soldiers could not return to their homes as they went to the front. Because they were

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<sup>167</sup> Vedica Kant, *India and The First World War: “if I Die Here, who Will Remember Me”* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2014), 20.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>170</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 1.

foreign to the region and the fact that geographically harsh conditions of the region, Indian soldiers had devastating experiences during the war in Iraq.

So how did the British, who did not want to include the Indians at the beginning, want to take advantage of them later in the war? What were the Indians charged for? What aspirations did the Indians serve the British? The most important ambition of the British in the region was to seize oil reserves. The Indians were, thus, admitted to the British army for this purpose. They would facilitate the British regional dominance by contributing to the British army. For these purposes,

“The British Government, in a pre-emptive move, asked India to dispatch an expeditionary force to Mesopotamia. The initial objectives of the force were to be protected for the Admiralty of the refineries, tanks, and pipelines of the Anglo Persian oil company at Abadan (technically in neutral Persia) and to assure the pro-British Arab sheiks of Kuwait and Mohammerah support against Turkey.”<sup>171</sup>

Moreover, the British intended to establish a connection between the Middle East and Indian colonies and to maintain its regional dominance.

### **3. 1. INDIANS TO THE WAR**

One of the most important extensions of the colonial activities was the establishment of a racial hierarchy. There was a very clear racial distinction between the colonizer and the colonized. This was also a reality for the Indian colony. For Indians, this war was an opportunity to break down the racial hierarchy and elevate themselves to an equally significant rank with their colonizer. Kant depicts the motivation of Indians as service in the war was seen by many Indians as a way to establish racial equality by proving that Indians were not lacking in courage and loyalty.<sup>172</sup> Military service was a job that superior people were dealing with at that time. Indians wanted to be elevated in the hierarchy, proving that they were eligible for the duty as well. Thus, the war was a great opportunity in that sense.

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<sup>171</sup> Kant, *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Apart from moving vertically in the hierarchy, financial incentives were also a very important factor. The economic return of military service was a very good deal during that period. Kant summarizes the economic benefits of the military service in the period as:

“The pay for a sepoy in the run-up to the war was about Rs. 11 a month (roughly equivalent Rs. 14,000 a month in today’s terms). This amount was increased during the active service to Rs. 18 a month during the war (about Rs. 25,800 today). In addition, sepoys also received war *bhatta*, a Rs. 50 bonus (roughly Rs. 5,700 and Rs. 57,000 in today’s terms respectively) on enlistment and free rations in and out of service. As the war progressed, the Indian Army also decided to allocate fertile plots of land to high rank sepoys.”<sup>173</sup>

For a colonized society, being part and parcel of the military and being able to go for war was not only an honorable act but also weighed enormous significance financially. This war was, thence, a substantial opportunity for Indians economically.

Another reason for Indians to join the war was dignity. It was an honor and a matter of prestige for Indians to fulfill their responsibility and to show their loyalty to the British administration. Fulfilling his responsibility and proving his loyalty would also bring with it a rise in the system. Gardner expresses the mentality as “In particular, loyal service to the king-emperor of India was a means of acquiring *izzat*, a concept similar to honor or prestige.”<sup>174</sup> In a more clear sense, Omissi states, “Judging from their letters, Indian soldiers fought, above all, to gain or preserve *izzat* -their honour, standing, reputation or prestige.”<sup>175</sup> Besides economic motivations, gaining *izzat* was an influential factor for Indians to be a part of the war. Likewise, the incentives of diminishing racial inequality, the purpose of gaining *izzat* was to be elevated in the hierarchy.

Not all but some Indian sepoys connected their involvement in the war with their adventurous characteristics. In this regard, Ghosh exemplifies Sisir Sarbadhikari who was an Indian sepoy “volunteered for the BAC (Bengal

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<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>174</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Ambulance Corps) in 1915... later attribute his enthusiasm to the ‘Spirit of Adventure’.”<sup>176</sup> His argument in terms of his cause for joining the army is true because

“This same spirit, he writes, would prompt him to volunteer for service again during the Second World War when he was over fifty. So it happened that he found himself under siege in not one but two world wars. The second instance was in Imphal in 1942, when the town was besieged by the Japanese.”<sup>177</sup>

Checked at WWI, Sisir ended up with the idea of joining the war again for the same reason. Ghosh argues that Sisir was not the only one who bore this spirit of adventure. “Some were so enthusiastic that they falsified their ages in order to be enlisted. One of them, Bhola, was only sixteen when he signed up – he would become a close friend of Sisir’s and he too would end up in the camps of Ras al-‘Ain.”<sup>178</sup> Not most of them but some, interestingly, desired to be a part of this first and most destructive war till then.

Last but not the least, nationalist groups also found it necessary to participate in this war. The reason was that participating in the war and taking part in it were seen as a bargaining tool on the path of freedom. Kant claims that “many nationalist leaders believed that India’s contribution to the war would allow her to demand greater freedoms from Great Britain and they believed that India could use her role in the war as a bargaining chip to fulfill these demands.”<sup>179</sup> Focusing on the mentality from a different angle, this was seen as a symptom of being colonized and dominated for many decades. Apart from all the incentives, hoping to gain freedom was the most peculiar aspect of the Indian sepoys on the way of entering the war.

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<sup>176</sup> Ghosh, *Shared Sorrows*, 3.

<sup>177</sup> Ghosh, *On To Baghdad*, 5.

<sup>178</sup> Ghosh, *Shared Sorrows*, 3.

<sup>179</sup> Kant, *Ibid.*, 17.

The British ultimately decided to include the Indians in the war. Now it was time to send them to the front. Upon the decision taken

“On October 7, 1914, A.D., the Government of India appointed Brigadier-General Delamain the commander of the expeditionary force for the invasion of Iraq and sent him these instructions: ‘When ‘A’ Force departs for Europe from Bombay on 16th October, ‘D’ Force must leave with them. Your orders are to part company with ‘A’ Force while at sea and to sail on to the Persian Gulf. When you reach the British controlled islands and territories of the Gulf you and your forces are to make inquiries about the Turkish forces and their readiness. You must use your own judgement. Another force will soon be dispatched to reinforce you. Your orders are to safeguard the British rights and interests in the Persian Gulf. The Shaikh of Muhammara is our ally; you must support him. When the fighting starts, you must take every measure towards the protection of Basra’.”<sup>180</sup>

Thus, the Indian troops that were to be Indian Expeditionary Force D (IEFD) and would go to the Mesopotamian Front set off from Bombay in early October and landed “near the Shatt-al Arab at the head of Persian Gulf on 6 November 1914.”<sup>181</sup>

In the letter left behind an Indian sepoy Kalyan Mukherji of 6th Poona Division and sent to the Mesopotamian front, the scene is depicted as follows. “On the 30th [of June] heavily loaded ships left with Indian battalions. They were all Marathas. Their parents, wives and, children came to see them off. Tears flowed! Slowly the ships began to move and the battalion bands struck up ‘Auld Lang Syne’.”<sup>182</sup> But from the very moment they arrived at the front, things would not be as they hoped. Another volunteer sepoy Sisir Sarbadhikari of 6th Poona Division depicts his arrival at the region as:

“Can this be the Basra of Caliph Haroun al-Rashid? Chhi, chhi! There’s not the faintest sign of the famous roses of Basra instead there are shallow little creeks filled with knee- or waist-deep water from the Tigris. Every one of these khuds is home to hundreds of thousands of frogs. They come in all sizes, but most are big bullfrogs. What a fearsome roar they have! It’s enough to deafen your ears. Men can’t hear each other talk.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ghosh, *At Home and The World*, 2.

<sup>181</sup> Kant, *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>182</sup> Ghosh, *On To Baghdad*, 6.

<sup>183</sup> Ghosh, *At Home and The World*, 4-5

From the very beginning what they had to deal with and what they had to get through in the course of the war were to be beyond their imaginations. They were to be both the criminals and, more of that, the victims of the war.

### **3. 2. CALL FOR JIHAD**

The high population of the Ottoman Empire was seen as a great contribution to its power in the First World War. Besides the population advantage of the empire, there was another that the Ottoman Sultan was also accepted as the caliph of all Muslims. Since there was a high proportion of Muslim populations in the colonies of European states, this power of the Ottoman Sultan worried them to a certain extent. One of the most important of these colonies was the Indian colony of the British, which a great deal of the Indian sepoy of the British army consisted of Indian Muslims. In this regard, the British were also busy with taking the necessary precautions and producing counter-discourses against the possibility of a call for jihad by the caliph. In the end, when the time came, the caliph invited all Muslims to the war on 14 November 1914 with the following proclamation:

“O Muslims, who are obedient servants of God! Of those who go to the Jihad for the sake of happiness and salvation of the believers of God’s victory, the lot of those who remain alive is felicity, while the rank of those who depart to the next world is martyrdom. In accordance with God’s beautiful promise, those who sacrifice their lives to give life to the truth will have honour in this world and their latter end is paradise.”<sup>184</sup>

Nevertheless, this call was to be fruitless. The jihad proclamation had no widespread effect. In general, Indian Muslim soldiers remained loyal to the British.

The call for jihad continued in the war. Especially on the Mesopotamian front, Muslim Turkish soldiers attempted to attract Muslim Indian sepoy to their side. “Written in several Indian languages, the documents exhorted the Indians to rise and murder the British officers and join their brothers the Turks, who would

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<sup>184</sup> Kant, *Ibid.*, 196.

pay them better and give them grants of land.”<sup>185</sup> After this campaign, “two soldiers from the 22nd and 66th Punjabis escaped from Kut on 27-8 December”<sup>186</sup> 1915. Apart from desertions, there was a hesitancy among the Muslim sepoy to fight against the Muslim Ottoman soldiers during the relief operations. During the Hanna operation on 21 January 1916, T.A.Chalmers recorded in his diary that “while Sikhs fought brilliantly, Muslims would not close.”<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, General Aylmer informed General Lake about the self-mutilation instances among the Muslim sepoy to avoid the conflict with the Ottoman Muslims.

The most striking of these examples took place during the Battle of Ctesiphon, that the place was named Selman-ı Pâk (Selman the Pure) by the Ottomans since the tomb of Salman the Persian who was one of the most faithful companions of the Prophet Mohammed was there. The Ottoman side prepared leaflets in Indian and Urdu that “highlighted the importance of the place to attract the Muslim sepoy to abandon the army of disbelievers and join their brothers in faith in the Ottoman army.”<sup>188</sup> These leaflets had an effect to some extent on the Muslim soldiers. “In October 1915, Captain Lecky recorded that four Muslim soldiers on picket watch close to Turkish lines had cut the throat of their commander and fired on the British positions before crossing over to the Ottoman lines.”<sup>189</sup> The soldiers not only escaped but also cut off their commander’s throat. The Mesopotamian front was one of the most complicated fronts in this war.

Besides the above-mentioned instances, self-mutilation was a common implementation among the Muslim Indian soldiers not to fight against the Ottoman soldiers. Under the influence of pamphlets distributed in the trenches, some of the Indian soldiers fired on their trigger fingers, making them unable to fight. In all these ways, Muslim Indian sepoy avoided fighting the Ottoman soldiers with whom they belonged to the same religion.

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<sup>185</sup> Garder, *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>188</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

The British side also produced policies and discourses against the Ottoman jihad policy in case it would be influential on the Muslim Indians. Therefore, at the very beginning of the Ottoman entry in the war, the British made the following announcement for the Muslim people.

“In view of the outbreak of war between Great Britain and Turkey, which, to the regret of Great Britain, has been brought about by the ill- advised, unprovoked and deliberate action of the Ottoman Government, his Excellence the Viceroy is authorized by His Majesty’s Government to make the following public announcement in regard to the Holy Places of Arabia, including the Holy Shrines of Mesopotamia and the port of Jeddah in order that there may be no misunderstanding on the part of His Majesty’s most loyal Moslem subjects as to the attitude of His Majesty’s Government in this war, in which no question of a religious character is involved. These Holy Places and Jeddah will be immune from attack or molestation by the British naval and military forces so long as there is no interference with pilgrims from India to the Holy Places and shrines in question. At the request of his Majesty’s Government the Governments of France and Russia have given similar assurances.”<sup>190</sup>

The proclamation highlighted that this war between the Ottoman Empire and Britain was not a religious war. Moreover, the British stated that it was not the one who started the war but rather deeply regrets the conflict with the Ottoman state. All in all, with this statement, Britain’s Crown Raj wanted to prevent the Indian Muslims from taking the Ottoman side and taking a front against it.

The Ottoman religion-based efforts did not have a large impact on Indian soldiers. Thereupon, another way had been tried by the Ottoman soldiers. “One Indian battalion in Mesopotamia was greeted by a shower of Hindi pamphlets warning them that England was starving and would soon be unable to feed and clothe them.”<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, Indian soldiers who had no intention to compromise their loyalty did not heed to this strategy of the Ottomans.

Also, because the Ottoman Empire was allied with the Germans, Ottoman jihad policy over British Christianity and religious differences with Muslims did not work on the Indians.

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<sup>190</sup> Fawaz, *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

“One Punjabi Muslim stationed in Persia wrote to a comrade deployed in France that he must have heard that the Indian forces of our King of Kings, George V has achieved a splendid victory and proclaimed Baghdad Holy. It is a matter of the greatest joy to us Muslims that this sacred place has escaped out of the hands of the evil Germans, and has come into the possession of our just King.”<sup>192</sup>

The contradiction between the Ottoman discourse and practices weakened its strategy on the Indian Muslims. Furthermore, “the Ottoman effort failed partly because so many Indian Muslims separated political duty from religious fealty.”<sup>193</sup> Indian Muslims were indifferent to the Ottoman policies, separating their political attitudes from their religious affiliation and even keeping their political interests above the latter. As a result of all these, the Ottoman strategies were inconclusive.

### **3. 3. ALIEN TO THE GEOGRAPHY**

The geography Indian soldiers came to fight was completely different from where they used to live.

“Between May and October temperatures could reach as high as 57 degrees C in the shade. Winter brought no relief, bringing harsh weather with torrential winds and bitter rains. The rain and desert were not friends; any significant downpour would turn the ground into a sea of glutinous mud. It is the narrative the British adhered to frequently and also making reference to a purported Arab proverb: ‘When Allah made Hell...he did not find it bad enough so he made Mesopotamia and added flies’.”<sup>194</sup>

When they volunteered to fight, they had little idea of where they would come. Besides, they did not have much idea about the geography and the conditions they would fight on. Or what were they about to deal with in Mesopotamia? “On arriving in Mesopotamia one regimental medical officer noted we drink river water but it gives about half an inch of mud per tumbler; another called it liquid mud.”<sup>195</sup> An Indian sepoy Kalyan Mukherji of the 6th Poona Division depicts the picture of others in his memoir.

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<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Kant, *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

“The poor fellows aren’t accustomed to this kind of thing and their eyes and noses were running. In the first place they have to put up with the dhamkaoings of the Sahib officers; then they have to associate with lowly doolie-bearers; nor is the food to their liking – and on top of that they have to march 20 miles a day. They’re in a bad way. Most of them say ‘if we knew that it would be like this then which damn fellow would have volunteered? We thought we’d see a few battles, pour water on the lips of the wounded, tie bandages and show everyone how brave Bengalis are (they’re very enthusiastic about all of this) – but we haven’t even heard the sound of artillery, let alone do any of that; all we do is work as coolies, they’re going to kill us with these marches’.”<sup>196</sup>

The situation was enough to make them regret. This geography where they came to be heroes with great dreams was very foreign to them. Thus, from the very beginning, they began to regret participating in the war on this front.

Apart from geographical conditions, Indian soldiers were also foreign to the people in the region. Besides, Indians did not have much idea about the background of the locals. They had no idea about the impact of this war on the local people or their expectations from this war. In this context, Kalyan Mukherji’s testimony about the happenings during the retreat to Kut after the defeat of Ctesiphon is to be a good example.

“At dawn we started marching again. On the 2nd after marching through the day, General Townshend’s hungry and exhausted troops entered Kut al-Amara. On the way many soldiers had been parted from their regiments and were marching alone. Not all of those who’d been separated made it to Kut; many probably lost their lives to Arabs, on the way.”<sup>197</sup>

Some were killed by indigenous Arabs during the retreat. In this land, where they came hundreds of kilometers away to become heroes, they were killed by the locals while retreating from a front that they lost, not by the enemy.

In this context, Townshend also recounts in his memoirs that the Indians were killed by the natives. He depicts that:

“[During the retreat to Kut] some Indian soldiers and a few soldiers who followed them fell to sleep at the bottom of a bush, so they were left

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<sup>196</sup> Ghosh, *On To Baghdad*, 8.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

behind... It was certain that several Indian soldiers went to the bushes to rest and their throats were cut by Arab horsemen.”<sup>198</sup>

Indian soldiers knew neither the geography nor its people in a certain sense. They did not know where the danger would come from or what should be considered in this geography. Their deaths came from this stigma.

### **3. 4. UP TO CTESIPHON, RETREAT, AND THE SIEGE**

At the beginning of the war, the British troops were advancing towards Baghdad which was the ultimate aim of insight without encountering any significant resistance. They even compared these clashes with the Ottoman soldiers to a jackal fight. Even more, they called this war in Mesopotamia a river picnic because they idea of defeat or retreat never crossed their mind. Sisir Sarbadhikari, an Indian sepoy in General Townshend’s army, expresses the mindset of the Anglo-Indian army in his memoir at the very beginning of the war as: “We all assumed that Baghdad would be easily taken and that a contrary outcome never even crossed our minds. In many units, the British officers began to say that they would celebrate Christmas 1915 in Baghdad.”<sup>199</sup>

Before the fight in Ctesiphon, the soldiers insisted they should use their food and water judiciously. Sisir decided to make tea the night before the fight without paying attention to the warnings of others and replied to the warning of a friend as follows: “I said: No water? Are you crazy? This ‘jackal fight’ will be over in a trice and we will be in Baghdad around 3 in the afternoon. There’ll be no shortage of water then’.”<sup>200</sup> Then he admits that “Perhaps when I said this the unseen goddess was laughing in secret. I certainly did reach Baghdad but not at 3 that day – after some six months and in completely different circumstances.”<sup>201</sup> This war in Mesopotamia was neither a jackal fight nor a river picnic for them.

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<sup>198</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>199</sup> Ghosh, *On To Baghdad*, 2.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

The Battle of Ctesiphon was undoubtedly one of the toughest battles between the Ottoman forces and the British troops in Mesopotamia. Of course, Indian soldiers in the British army also encountered these challenges as much as everyone else to the very core. Sisir states that this battle was terrifying from the very beginning. He says that

“The hours slipped by but the ‘jackal fight’ showed no sign of coming to an end. All this while we were treating the wounded. Around us were innumerable dead. Everyone started to say that a great number had been killed. Apart from our own brigade, wounded men from other brigades came to us too. Everyone was saying the same thing, that many had been killed and wounded. But we could see that for ourselves.”<sup>202</sup>

He expresses that the corpses were mixed on the battlefield and the horrors of the landscape were as follows:

“One man’s limb in another man’s stomach, another’s in someone’s eye, that’s how they were lying – and in the midst of these some were still alive – rescuing them was impossibly difficult. I saw a Sikh sitting with a smile on his face – his white teeth were shining in his black beard. I thought, why are you smiling at a time like this, have you lost your head? When I approached I saw that he had been dead a while. He must have grimaced in pain as he was dying.”<sup>203</sup>

The bodies were entangled. They encountered a resistance they had never expected. And in the end, they were defeated in a manner they had neither experienced nor expected. But among all these, Sisir depicts the most striking and terrifying view as:

“By that time we were desperate for food and water. Twelve hours before we had been given two chapatis and a bottle of water, after that nothing. Amulya [another BAC volunteer] and I set off to look for food and found a piece of bread in the haversack of a dead white soldier. We divided it between us and were eating it in the dark, when we realized that the bread had a peculiar taste. Then we understood. The bread had soaked up the soldier’s blood, hence the taste.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

As a result of Ctesiphon, they had to retreat that they have never imagined since the very beginning of the war. The Indians, along with other soldiers, had to struggle with all kinds of difficulties, i.e. water and food shortages, diseases, and being killed by the locals on the way, while withdrawing. They had a lot of casualties. Furthermore, they suffered from water and food shortages. Nonetheless

“It was not just the lack of food that took its toll. At night the temperature would drop below freezing point and the troops tried desperately not to sleep off for long periods at night for fear of frostbite. Having marched 44 miles in 36 hours with little or no water and food, they finally reached Kut.”<sup>205</sup>

The Indians faced all the difficulties of this war in Mesopotamia. For this very reason, some soldiers embarked on an introspection journey. They began to inquire amongst themselves their involvement in the war as they had to cope with a tremendous amount of difficulties. Why did they fight this war? Why were they with the British? What reason on earth pushed them into this war? One of the sepoys who tried to find an answer to all these kinds of questions was Kalyan Mukherji in Townshend’s army. He found his answer by blaming patriotism and the hegemony of the Great Powers.

“England is the teacher. The love of country that England has always taught, that same love of country whose virtues are sung by all civilized nations – that is what all this bloodshed is for. Grabbing someone else’s country – that’s ‘Patriotism’. Patriotism – that’s what builds kingdoms and empires. To display the love of country, love of race, by seizing a piece of territory, at the cost of thousands and thousands of lives, this is what the English have taught. Now the youth of our country have started to emulate these vile ways of loving one’s nation. As a result, all kinds of horrifying things have started to happen, people are dead and bombs have been thrown at a blameless Viceroy. I spit in the face of patriotism. As long as this narrow-mindedness is not wiped off the face of this earth there will be no end to bloodshed in the name of patriotism. Whether one man throws a bomb from a rooftop or 50 men hurl shells from a cannon – all this bloodshed, this madness springs from the same cause.”<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Kant, *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>206</sup> Ghosh, *At Home and The World in Iraq 1915-17*, 7.

With all these difficulties and interrogations, Indian soldiers were stuck in Kut and were waiting to be rescued.

### **3. 5. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE INDIAN SEPOYS IN KUT**

Indians lived in a colonized state and under harsh conditions before the war broke out. Thus, they went into this war seeing it as a glorious opportunity to feast on. Afterward, they found themselves under the hard conditions of the war. Now, after the defeat of Ctesiphon, they had to live in Kut's harsh conditions and in the hope of being rescued. Moreover, they did not have any significant power to attack. They were completely in a defensive position. Vice Commander of 51 Division, Mehmed Reşid states the condition of the soldiers in Kut as “The enemy stuck in Kut was in a state of distress and misery due to the food shortages and diseases according to the states and testimonies of the refugees.”<sup>207</sup> The misery of the Indians continued without any relief in Kut.

Under the difficult conditions in Kut, some of the Indian soldiers had begun to escape. Both these conditions and the Ottoman policy of attracting Muslim sepoys had influenced the Indians. While some managed to escape, some were caught. On 27-28 December 1915, “two sepoys, from the 22nd and 66th Punjabis respectively, went over to the enemy.”<sup>208</sup> Contrary to these sepoys, a sepoy from 103rd Light Infantry, which had defended the fort stubbornly on Christmas Eve, attempted to escape but was captured and executed<sup>209</sup> on January 1, 1916.

The soldiers trapped in Kut were waiting for the Relief Force with great hope and agitation. Each day passing without the arrival of the Relief Force made it even more difficult to bear the conditions in Kut. Sisir Sarbadhikari in his memoir on March 4, 1916 states that:

“Our rations are being cut daily since the Relieving Force retired...Some Muslim sepoys have fled from Kut and run over to the Turks – in other

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<sup>207</sup> ATASE, *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>208</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

words they've deserted. In wartime other than mutiny, there is no greater crime than desertion. If caught, the punishment is also extreme – death.”<sup>210</sup>

Even though, hunger and despair forced some of the soldiers to desert their troops, arrest led to death. Sisir summarizes the process of desertion and what happened unless soldiers managed to escape.

“One day a young fellow of the 119th Regiment was caught trying to escape. Some Sikhs were on their way back from the trenches when they saw the chokra, walking past the trenches. This made the Sikh Subedar suspicious and he brought the fellow to the O.C. of the 119th. The chokra was unable to provide a satisfactory account of his unruly behaviour. There was a summary court-martial – sentence, death! The firing party was picked from his own company – perhaps it included men from his own village or perhaps even a relative. He was blindfolded and his chest was laid bare by the medical officer of the 119th who turned him to face the firing squad. The adjutant looked on. after it was over, the medical officer, Capt. Ubhaya, examined him to make sure he was dead.”<sup>211</sup>

An Indian soldier fleeing to the Ottoman side only depicts the situation inside on 26 December 1916 as “there was virtually no wheat. [The British] They give us two small breads and a handful of barley a day. They also give their white soldiers soup with excess salt and no sugar. The available dates were given to the British soldiers with tea.”<sup>212</sup> The conditions were extreme and unbearable for all the soldiers. But it was even worse for Indian soldiers because the British soldiers received privileged treatment. This resulted in self mutilations, apart from desertions, among Indian soldiers.

Some Indian soldiers wanted to get rid of war conditions by harming themselves. In his memoir, “Townshend recalled the discovery of more than a dozen sepoys in a single battalion who shot their trigger fingers thereby pretending to be wounded.”<sup>213</sup> The sepoys were firing on their trigger fingers, making them unable to fight. More so, they wanted to stay behind the front by pretending they were patient. Kut was getting worse day by day for Indian soldiers.

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<sup>210</sup> Ghosh, *On To Baghdad*, 21.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>212</sup> ATASE, *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>213</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 82.

This was the same for Indian soldiers in the Relief Force. T. A. Chalmers who was in the Relief Force under the command of General Younghusband mentions in his diary “[Three Afridi Pathans of 28th Punjabis, part of the 19th Brigade] were made to dig their own graves and were permitted to lay in them when the time came. They were finished off by Tommies.”<sup>214</sup> Exhaustion and the severe war conditions were consuming Indian soldiers. Each mistake they had made ended up with death. Both inside and outside Kut, the region turned into a mass grave for Indian sepoy.

Each day passing without relief was melting the food stock in Kut. For this very reason, Townshend decided to cut daily rations in the early months of 1916. The very handicap of this food shortage and cutback of daily rations for Indian sepoy was absolute starvation because the scarcity of wheat and barley had adverse effects on rearing animal stock, especially horses and mules in Kut. Indians who do not eat meat for the sake of cultural and religious reasons were at stake and highly prone to starvation. They did accept just goat and milk in the sense of protein intake. Nevertheless, “when supplies of both of these items were exhausted by the end of January [1916], however, the vast majority of sepoy declined to follow their British counterparts in transitioning to horse and mule.”<sup>215</sup> On the other hand, declining to eat horsemeat caused plenty of negative fallouts for Indians. First and foremost, refusing fresh meat likely increased sepoy’s susceptibility to scurvy. It also left them without an adequate source of protein. Moreover, “the Indians’ eschewal of horse and mule intensified the growing food shortage inside Kut.”<sup>216</sup> All these outcomes put the sepoy in a risk of starvation and the target of scurvy and dysentery. The disease rate soared, and “by late April there were fifteen men dying from dysentery alone every day.”<sup>217</sup> Kalyan Mukherji who was in BAC (Bengal Ambulance Corps) depicts the situation in his letter to his mother on 16 April 1916 that:

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<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>217</sup> Faulkner, *Ibid.*, 91.

“After three months with very little to eat the troops are starving. The mortality rate in the hospital has soared. In the last 15 days, many have died for lack of food. Of what use is medicine now? There’s nothing to eat. People are coming to the hospital because starvation has made them weak. With nothing to give them, how can we help? Apart from that, there are no medicines left either.”<sup>218</sup>

In the beginning, Townshend supplied vegetables and other sources of food for those who refused to eat horsemeat. However, through the end of the siege, almost all the food stocks were depleted so Townshend decided to no longer favor Indians. Both Townshend’s attempt to compel Indian soldiers to consume horsemeat and the increasing death rate persuaded the vast majority of Indians to eat horsemeat. According to Rogers, “the Indian officers of the 76th Punjabis agreed to eat horse in front of their men who now appear to be willing to eat it. Thus, by 14 April the vast majority of Indians had abandoned their earlier commitment of not consuming meat and nearly 10,000 were now eating meat.”<sup>219</sup>

After all, towards the end of the siege, Indian soldiers were physically and psychologically exhausted. Not only did they have to deal with hunger and illnesses but also the aura of hopelessness which was gradually creeping amongst the ranks of the Relief Force. As if this was not enough, they also did not get any news from home. Sisir Sarbadhikari depicts the psychological transition through the end of the siege in Kut.

“Despite everything, the eighteen of us would drum up a noise and have fun. Every evening we would sing. Our billet became a small club. An artillery driver called Malaband used to come often. He was a God-fearing man; but in the end he lost his mind and killed himself. Several others killed themselves in Kut. Initially, there was hunger together with all the other physical torments. Above that, no news from home. There’s nothing strange about losing your mind in those circumstances.”<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ghosh, *At Home and The World in Iraq, 1915-17*, 11.

<sup>219</sup> Gardner, *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>220</sup> Ghosh, *On To Baghdad*, 23.

Not only dealing with the physical torments but also psychological burden led eventually to suicides in Kut. As said before, Kut turned into a mass grave for Indian soldiers.

### 3. 6. SURRENDER



<sup>221</sup> The failure of the Relief Force to rescue Kut and the conjuncture inside in the sense of exhaustion of the troops made the British side sit at the table of negotiation. The negotiations were conducted between

Halil Pasha on behalf of the Ottoman Empire and General Townshend on behalf of the British. On the other hand, The British Intelligence Agents Captain Lawrence and Herbert were involved in the process. Eventually, Townshend had to accept unconditional surrender. Following the agreement, the Ottoman troops took the delivery of Kut on 29 April 1916. Just after the surrender, General Townshend and the CO of the Ottoman 6<sup>th</sup> Army Halil Pasha photographed together. The pride in Halil Pasha's face and the sullenness of General Townshend is like a summary of the current situation. In line with war ethics and courtesy of a commander, Halil Pasha assured General Townshend that he would be treated as he deserved. He kept his words and General Townshend was sent to Prince Islands in Istanbul in a comfortable way. Until the Armistice, General Townshend spent his time in the island as a prisoner of the Ottoman Empire. On the other side of the coin, the fate of the Indian soldiers would not be the same as that of their commanders.

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<sup>221</sup> Ghos, *On To Baghdad*, 28.

The agreement terms resulted in complete frustration for the Indians. Sisir Sarbadhikari who was one of the insiders depicts the day of surrender as “This is a day not to be forgotten. Orders were published that the Turks did not want to release us on parole or any other grounds. We would have to surrender unconditionally.”<sup>222</sup> The Indian sepoys hoped to be paroled after the surrender. However, this was not the case.

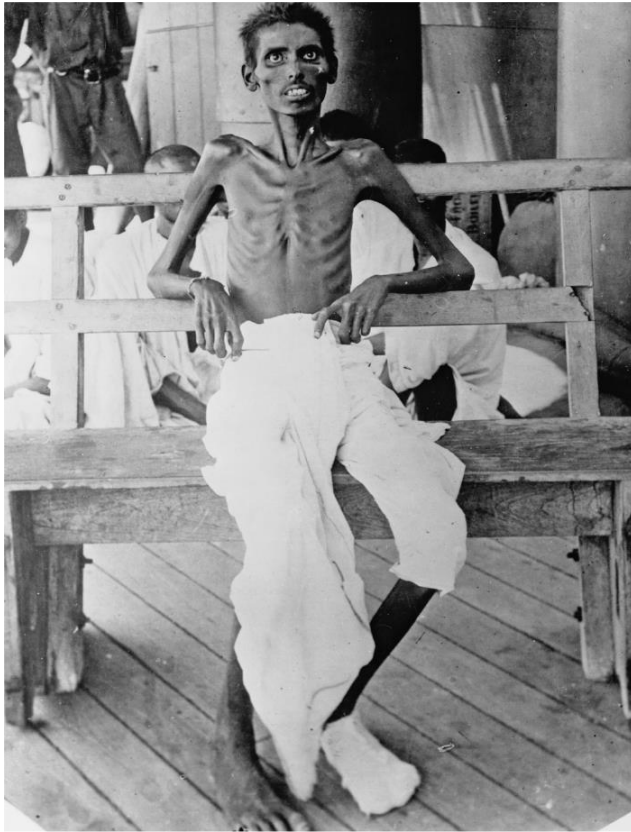
During the negotiations between Halil Pasha and Agent Lawrence, the situation of Indians was put on the table. However, Halil Pasha did not perceive Indians as he perceived white soldiers. To him, the Indians and the British were not in the same ballpark. They were not equal. This mentality found its reflection in the exchange terms for prisoners. Halil Pasha agreed on the term that “the British sick and wounded be evacuated in exchange for healthy Ottomans in the British prisons of war camps.”<sup>223</sup> The British side intended to extend this term to cover the others. Nevertheless, “Halil Pasha insisted on exchanging Britons for Turks, Indians for Arabs.”<sup>224</sup> In the eyes of the Ottoman commander, just as were they not equal to the British, Indians were likewise not regarded as equal to Turks. Exchanging Indians for Turks was unacceptable for Halil Pasha. In this framework, there was no parole for Indians.

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<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>223</sup> Faulkner, *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*



Another important issue put on the table by Halil Pasha was the transportation of the soldiers. Halil Pasha records in his memoir that “I do not want to march these exhausted troops in the desert. I had a ferry but no coal. I wrote a letter to General Gorrige and requested coal to transport his soldiers to the north. I requested it just enough to transport his own soldiers to Baghdad. He responded that ‘since we are in a state of war, it is not possible to provide you coal’.”<sup>225</sup>

Following this response, the outcome was marching the troops hundreds of kilometers under the desert conditions. The decisions taken on the table among the ones who managed the war had devastating outcomes for the ones who had to obey these decisions. Photographed in May 1916, an Indian soldier captured in Kut was one of those who had to march hundreds of miles to his prison camp. Being in a true sense skin and bone, this Indian soldier without a sock reveals doubtlessly the effect of war on them. The first prisoner convoy consisting of the soldiers of “the 16th and 17th Brigade was dispatched to Baghdad almost 170 km away from Kut on April 30, 1916 [the day after surrender], in the guards of three cavalry troops.”<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Çifci, *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>226</sup> Türkmen, *Ibid.*, 60.

### 3. 7. TREATMENT AFTER SURRENDER

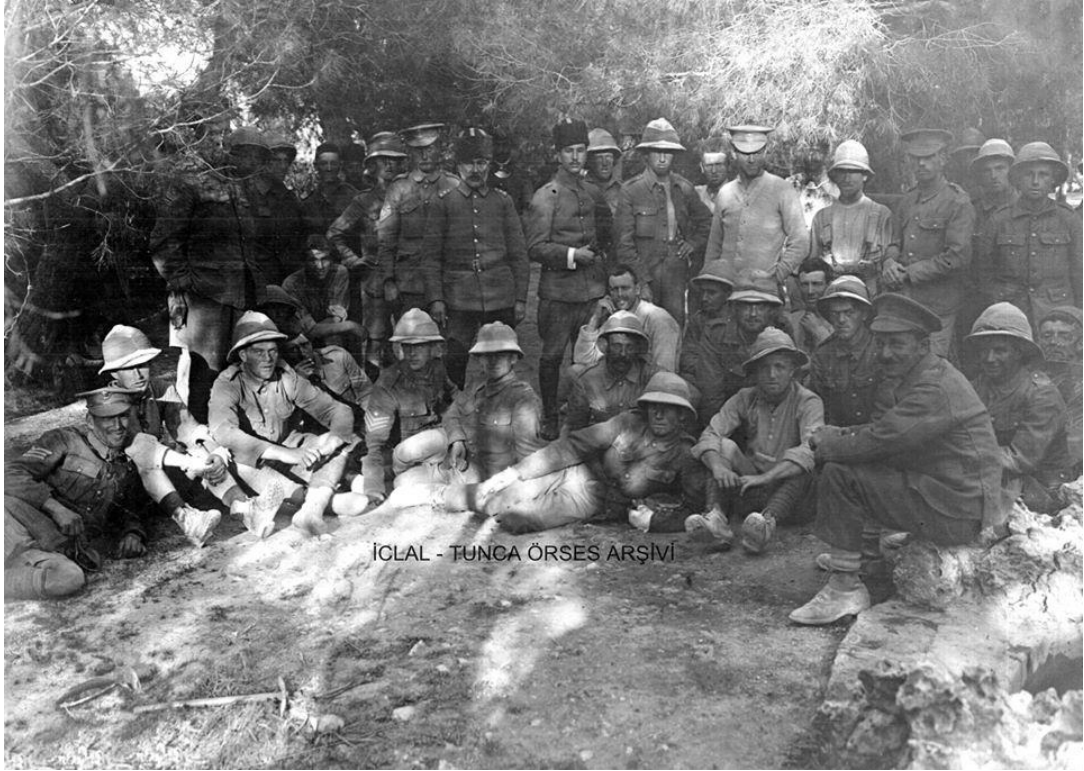
After the surrender, Townshend who was the most significant prisoner of the war was sent to Prince Island in Istanbul. Thus, he had to abandon his soldiers behind without any influence in terms of the conditions they had to deal with. The situation of the soldiers was recounted by The British Captain A. J. Shakeshaft in his diary that:

“We met a number of unfortunates: The British and Indian soldiers who were standing at the door of a miserable yard, where they were herded together. They looked ghastly. They were sick, left behind by one of the columns. . . . They were in a miserable plight, many suffering from dysentery. Others were fairly fit, but had no boots for marching. There were about 80 British and Indian. They received only a ration of wheat. The Arabs used to bring milk and eggs to sell and asked exorbitant prices. Consequently, they would soon have no money and would die of starvation and neglect. There were no guards over them and they were completely abandoned. Sometimes, when a sick man would crawl out of the hovel they lived in, Arabs would throw stones and chase him back into the yard. I will spare the reader any description of the dark, filthy hovel where they slept.”<sup>227</sup>

The diaries and memoirs left behind by the soldiers mention usually that it was difficult to describe the situation of some soldiers waiting to be transported. The conditions they were in during the siege were not over. On the contrary, their situation was getting worse day by day.

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<sup>227</sup> Fawaz, *Ibid.*, 226-7.



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After the delivery of Kut, the prisoners were sent to labor camps. Marching through Anatolia, POWs photographed on a small break. They hoped to be welcomed in a descent manner and be freed from the war conditions. While some smiled with hope, many were worried. Photographed with summer clothes, these soldiers would be hit in winter by the cold Anatolian plain. Besides, these soldiers traveling with their commanders did not expect an end like that of the commanders. During this period, from the very beginning, Indians had been subjected to ill-treatment. Sisir Sarbadhikari who was transported on 12th May 1916 to Baghdad wrote in his memoir concerning the treatment towards the Indian sepoy that

“The white or The British soldiers are behaving very badly against the black or Indian sepoy, they’re even beating them! They say that it is because of the Indians that they lost at Kut! It’s unimaginably vile. The astonishing thing is that even when complaints are taken to the British officers, they do nothing.”<sup>229</sup>

<sup>228</sup> Fotoğraflarla I. Dünya Savaşı Arşivi (İclal-Tunca Örses Arşivi), “KUT Zaferi tutsakları Anadolu yollarında verilen bir molada,” Facebook, April 5, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/I.Dunya.Savasi.Iclal.Tunca.Orses.Arsivi/permalink/2666939793418302/>

<sup>229</sup> Ghosh, *On To Baghdad*, 31.

The ill-treatment was directed not just from the enemy they surrendered but at the same time from the ones they fought with. They were charged for the loss of Kut. Thus, they were again in the target of racist policies by the white soldiers.

In this context, Indian sepoys were subjected to inferior status among the prisoners. Not all but some parts of the captives were embarked on steamers to be transported to their camps. During the sail, Indians were not allowed to travel with the white soldiers. “The whites are sitting in comfort in the lower deck, every one of them has space to sleep. We (Indians) are on the upper deck – there’s no roof over our heads, and we scarcely have enough space to sit.”<sup>230</sup> Neither during the war nor in a state of being captives, Indians were admitted in equal status with others. The British expected to get privileged status though all were prisoners of the Ottoman Empire.

“Major E.W.C. Sandes who was captured with the 6th Division at Kut recalled how as POWs our first business was naturally to get separate accommodation for the Indian officer. We explained also that Indian officers, in spite of the badges of rank on their shoulders were always of inferior rank to the British officers and were under their orders’.”<sup>231</sup>

Indians were not even allowed to be in the same place as the British. Moreover, being in the same place as them was considered unacceptable to the British. Indian soldiers were the focus of racist and humiliating policies at every stage of the war.

POWs were sent to their camps through the way of Baghdad on a steamer, then Samarra, about 60 miles, by train, and Mosul by marching twenty-five days from Samarra.<sup>232</sup> Prisoners were separated from each other in Mosul. To the Ottoman elites, Hindus and Sikhs were not equal to Muslims and the British POWs. Therefore, the conditions for the Hindus and Sikhs did not continue the same. They

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<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Kant, *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>232</sup> Ghosh, *Shared Sorrows*, 4.

were subjected to being sent to Ras al-‘Ain where they were to work on a rail line.<sup>233</sup> Discriminating between the ones who once fought together when to be taken prisoners was a huge impact on Hindus. They encountered the bitter reality of being in a foreign geography. This was to be seen in the memoirs left by soldiers. Among whom, Sisir Sarbadhikari had never mentioned a distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim groups until this point. Now, “Sisir and his comrades were surprised and disturbed to learn that the Indian POWs, who had served together on the battlefield, were now to be split up along religious lines.”<sup>234</sup> They were no longer considered equal as people with whom they shared the same fate. Hindus, now, had to work on the railway while others were sent to Anatolia.

The white soldiers, especially the British officers, received the best and most privileged treatment among all the POWs. After being split up in Mosul, they were sent to several Anatolian cities. Moreover, “each officer was given a living wage by the Ottoman authorities and allowed a servant to do his shopping and cooking. Accommodation was always basic, but officers had a roof over their heads and a modicum of comforts.”<sup>235</sup> What was more is that they were sent to their final destination by not marching as well as Indian POWs but by steamship, rail, and horseback. E. H. Jones, a lieutenant in the British army imprisoned in a central Anatolian city of Yozgat, expresses how they spent their times in captivity that

“Our chief problem was how to pass the time. We had four-a-side hockey tournaments and (when the Turks allowed) walks, picnics, tobogganing, and skiing. For indoor amusement we wrote dramas, gay and serious, melodramas, farces and pantomimes. We had an orchestra of prison-made instruments, a prison-trained male-voice choir and musicians to write the music for them.”

Not all, of course, but most of them, especially if the prisoner was a British officer, had trouble with just how to while away his days in captivity.

Other than British prisoners of war, Muslim POWs had a privileged status in the eyes of the Ottoman high command compared to other Indian POWs. Muslim

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<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Rogan, *Ibid.*, 271.

soldiers, and especially Muslim officers, were under somewhat more comfortable conditions. Moreover, they had the right to freedom of movement on special days. On August 6, 1916, the Ottoman sultan published an edict that “The great sultan, from now onwards grants the permission of carrying sword and freedom of movement on Bayram (religious holiday) to Muslim Indian officers who were taken prisoners in Kut since they fought against the Khalifa under compulsion.”<sup>236</sup> While others had to overcome the troubles of being imprisoned, i.e. working on a rail line in Ras al- ‘Ain under the desert conditions, the Muslim and the British POWs had been granted privileges in their billet.

The racist policies continued even in captivity. Indian POWs encountered this inferiority status under almost every management. Sisir who was one of those imprisoned in Ras al ‘Ain details in his memoir on 12 February 1917 that an official distributed the money to the prisoners. “Five liras for the whites, four for the Russians and three liras for us. The money comes from The British or Indian POW funds, but still the Russians get more than us. Not only are we a defeated race, we’re black on top of that’.”<sup>237</sup> Indians were perceived to be at the bottom pile of the racial hierarchy. Sisir Sarbadhikari describes in his memoir the condition of the sepoy's capitulated at Kut:

“That was our first winter in Turkey and we had no clothes to speak of. Many didn’t have boots. The prisoners would be taken to work barefoot on the line, in the snow. They would get frostbite at first and then the flesh would fall off and the wounds would turn gangrenous.”<sup>238</sup>

Thus, the outcome is not surprising that “E.A.Walker, a British officer, estimated that 75 per cent of the Indian prisoners died in that first year.”<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> HR. MTV 768/27-1, 6 Ađustos 1916.

<sup>237</sup> Ghosh, *Shared Sorrows*, 13.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*



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Not just compared to the white soldiers they fought with but also compared to the whites taken prisoners from other fronts, Indian POWs were considered the least important captives. Thus, they received the worst treatment from the Ottoman side. Townshend depicts the landscape in his memoir that those who traveled through the way from Baghdad to Afyon Karahisar, (a town in Anatolia), would not be surprised at the deaths (mostly because of dysentery) when they think about the exhausted and emaciated soldiers who had to march via this way after the fall of Kut.”<sup>241</sup> The officers were sent to somewhat preferential camps. Nevertheless, the soldiers were subjected to the conditions that they found themselves in a war of survival. Doubtless to say, the Indian sepoy suffered most. “They were sent to labor camps to work on the Berlin-Baghdad Railway line where they had bare provisions to survive on. More than two-thirds of the 12,000 men who surrendered at Kut never returned home.”<sup>242</sup> The rest returned their home after the Armistice. One has a little smile on his face but the rest carries the burden what they lived in

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<sup>240</sup> Credit to İclal-Tunca Örses Archives.

<sup>241</sup> Townshend, *Ibid.*, 619.

<sup>242</sup> Faulkner, *Ibid.*, 94.

the lands they fought and were prisoned. They arrived these lands to become a hero in their own lives but neither the ones who died nor the ones who returned succeeded that. The only thing that is certain they lost their lives in those lands which they had little or no idea about its existence and whereabouts initially.

## CONCLUSION

The First World War affected the lives of not only those who took advantage of this war but also people who had nothing to do with it. Nonetheless, all the lives of those who participated in this war was never like before. In this sense, a group of people whose lives were irreversibly changed even though it was not related to this war were Indians. In spite of the fact that Indians saw some profits to gain later on this war, they had actually no benefit but breaking the chains of colonialism imposed by the British.

At the very beginning of the war, the British government did not have the intention of including the Indian colony into the war. The crown was in mind that such a great power did not need its colony to win the war. Besides, they had the concern that if the people of dominions -which in this case were Indians- realized that they could kill the supreme European man on the battlefield, this would have created an irreversible change in the mind of all the people. The realization of the power of colonies in this sense could have generated riots for independence in the British dominated areas. However, the course of the war forced the British government to involve the Indians in the war.

On the other side, the Indians were actually disposed to fight the war for some reason. One of which was to gain *izzat* by proving their eligibility for the war also demonstrating their allegiance and loyalty to the crown. Actualizing those would certainly elevate their status and rank in society as they hoped to climb the hierarchical ladder. In other words, they desired to uplift their social status because as a race that has long been colonized, they were perceived as inferior by the colonizer. Furthermore, they acknowledged this war as a golden opportunity to capitalize on. Because they were a colony and perceived as inferior, they did not have much of a chance to be involved in the economic activities that brought great profits. On the other hand, people who were busy with military duty made much more profit. In that very sense, the Indians had the intention of getting involved in the war. As a result of all these reasons, they were applied to the British Raj in order to engage with the enemy of the crown. Besides, the British needed to include as

many people as possible to the war. In the end, both sides agreed that it was a must letting the colony join the war. Thus, the British Raj promulgated the approval of the Indians' involvement in WWI.

Upon the allowance of the British War Council on August 5, 1914, the Indian people were sent to the fronts, ranging from Flanders to Mesopotamia, where they were needed to contribute to the British army. Among all, one of the most drastic fronts was the Mesopotamian front for the Indians. The first meeting of the Indian soldiers with the region was very staggering. They were shocked by what they saw. Sisir Sarbadhikari, who was one of the Indian sepoy sent to the area and left memoirs behind him had difficulty putting into words what he had encountered. He was surprised and found it hard to believe it to be the city of Caliph Haroun al-Rashid. There was desert all-around. Despite that, the Anglo-Indian army who were in high spirits had advanced through Baghdad without any significant resistance at the very beginnings. As a matter of fact, they saw their encounter with the enemy as a jackal fight. Moreover, all agreed that the war on this front was a river picnic. Nevertheless, their fate was not what they imagined. On November 22, 1914, the course of the war turned against them. After the defeat at Ctesiphon, they had to retreat and eventually take shelter in Kut. As a result, they had to deal with a siege that lasted for five-month approximately.

The British colonial mind did not stop here either. The Indians were seen as responsible for the defeat at Ctesiphon. Not only seen as responsible for the defeat but also they were accused of weakness during the siege. In the eyes of the white European soldiers, the Indian sepoy were naturally vulnerable to the hard conditions of the war. In that sense, all the blame was directed to them. Nevertheless, these accusations were not only discursively but also turned into physical violence. According to the memoirs and the letters of the Indian soldiers, they were beaten by the white soldiers because of their so-called weakness.

Besides, the Indians were the main target of starvation and scurvy owing to the acute food scarcity. Day after day the food stocks were melting due to the extension of the siege and the delay of the Relief Force to rescue Kut. Based on these troubles, General Townshend decided to cut rations in half and use the animal

stock to cover the supplies gap. However, the Indians who did not eat the horse meat due to culture and their religious affiliations they became more vulnerable to starvation and scurvy. Needless to say, this also generated unrest among the soldiers because day by day the death rate was rising and all the men inside were necessary to defend Kut. As a result of all these challenges, self mutilations and desertions escalated. The Indian soldiers either cut their trigger fingers to avoid the war conditions or deserted to the enemy side to be in better circumstances. After all, they either starved or were executed by firing squad.

Indians also aroused the attention of the Ottoman high command. Since a great extent of the British army of Mesopotamia consisted of the Indian soldiers, Ottoman commanders tried to build ties with the Indians. In this regard, the Ottoman side distributed pamphlets grounded on Islamic discourse to the Anglo-Indian trenches so as to tempt the Indians to abandon the British army and come over its side. Although the Ottoman elites had desired to attract the Indians to their side, they were subjected to the Ottoman colonialism.

The Indians were perceived as inferior compared to the white European soldiers, based on the ground of racial hierarchy and discrimination by the Ottoman high command. During the negotiation between Colonel Halil Pasha and Agent Captain Lawrence through the end of the siege, the issue came to the prisoners. Contrary to Lawrence's proposal, Colonel Halil Pasha did not recede from his offer that insisted Britons for Turks and Indians for Arabs. To him, the Indians were not on par with the Turks and the British. If there was to be a change, the Indians could be exchanged with Arabs who were in a state of savagery for the Ottoman elites then. As a result, the issue of exchanging the prisoners was withdrawn from the offers tabled.

Besides, the troubles that the Indians had to overcome in this war did not come to an end with the surrender. They had to be transported from Kut to their prison camps. Needless to say, the Indian POWs found themselves in different circumstances compared to the white soldiers. During the transportation, the Indians were set placed at the upper deck that did not have enough space even to sit. On the other, the white soldiers were at the lower deck which was more

comfortable, at least they had enough space to sleep. On top of that, the Indians were beaten by the white soldiers on the basis that the defeat was because of them. Furthermore, they did not go all the way on a steamer. To reach their prison camps, they had to march five hundred miles under the desert conditions. In the end, what was waiting for them was to work on the rail lines.

Indians were one of the most marginalized groups in this war. At the very beginning, they were excluded from the war, regarded as a non-martial race. They were alienated in their own land and perceived as an inferior group. They were foreign to their own country. Nevertheless, when it was a must for the British to aggrandize its army, they were involved in the war and sent to the Mesopotamian front which they had barely known there. Those lands gave them difficulties from beginning to end. They moved, fought and lived under the desert conditions, which they were not accustomed to. When they moved, they were killed by the locals while resting. When they fought, they had to deal with floods and mud. When they lived, they had to overcome the challenges imposed by both the enemy and the geography. They were foreign to geography and the people living there. Furthermore, when they were defeated, they were beaten by the white soldiers. During the siege, they were the main group as the target of starving and diseases. When they surrendered, they were classified as inferior by the Ottoman side as well. As POWs, they were exposed to living under more difficult conditions compared to the white and the Muslim prisoners. They were foreign to the war. In the end, they were foreign to everything.

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