

Chapter 5

The Ottomans and Toleration

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Toleration is a condition of diversity. All kinds of diversity can be considered: diversity of ethnicity, race, and religion, but also diversity of traditions, opinions, political thoughts, and habits. The concern of this chapter, religious and ethnic diversity, existed in most societies of the world for long historical periods. Such diversity has often led to brutality and violence. At other times, diversity has become the basis for different types of arrangements that have promoted peaceful coexistence. A sociological analysis of toleration would need to highlight the conditions under which notions and practices of toleration emerge in a society and polity, the role of different public authorities and social groups, the boundaries that are erected between groups, and the resources to which actors have access. Accordingly, we need to understand who is tolerated, why they are being tolerated, who is doing the tolerating, and the kinds of institutional arrangements employed to ensure this kind of forbearance. In my work, I take a relational approach that underscores the capacity of relations between groups to make for tolerant outcomes. I especially stress the role of public authorities and the relations between authorities and communities of difference. In this chapter, I explore the conditions of toleration in the Ottoman Empire, differentiate it from “tolerance,” and provide examples of a particular form that emerged in an imperial context.

DEFINITIONS OF TOLERATION AND THEIR CONTINUING IMPORTANCE TODAY

Toleration is a rich and contested subject of study in many of the social sciences and the humanities. The literature on toleration is vast, somewhat unwieldy, and often based on Western-centric assumptions that see toleration

as a European invention, the result of Western intellectual thought. Yet toleration is complex, varied, and its history is vast. All over the world, rulers of ancient empires exercised toleration; it was a strategy available to political elites and it often functioned jointly with persecution, its opposite. In order to debate toleration and its utility in contemporary contexts, we need to understand its historical antecedents. Traditional multiethnic and multireligious empires, such as Ancient India, especially at the time of Ashoka (304–232 BCE), the Mughal Empire, the Ottoman Empire, or the later Habsburg Empire, remain recognized and certainly well-documented historical examples of imperial toleration. In each of these cases, coexistence between populations of different religious and ethnic groupings was made possible by the policies of the particular rulers. This is neither to romanticize the past and its particular form of tolerant coexistence nor to dismiss it as a nondemocratic and hierarchical political context of toleration. Instead my aim is to historicize toleration, to understand its particular underpinnings, to see why it had a “positive function” of maintaining peace and social order, and to dissect particular mechanisms that might be transportable today.

I define toleration as more or less an absence of persecution when power relations make violence possible and the acceptance of a plurality of religions but not necessarily their recognition into society as full and welcomed members either as individuals or communities. Toleration can simply mean the acceptance of “difference” and a lack of interest beyond the instrumentality to maintain a coherent polity. Or more broadly, as defined in this volume, toleration is “the virtue of refraining from exercising one’s power to interfere with others’ opinion or action although that deviates from one’s own over something important and although one morally disapproves of it.”¹ Toleration therefore implies “not acting” from thoughtful or strategic action that causes restraint. It denotes a choice made by public authorities as well as groups within society to use command and moderation. In many historical examples of diversity on the ground, “tolerant rulers” have acted to preserve the social order. Toleration in this form is exercised by authorities and powerful groups and is embodied in an institutional context. Such pragmatic calculation is still essential to many societies in which diversity and difference are the norm and in which groups strongly claim their groupness as essentialized identities. In such situations, toleration remains a core value of human societies, because it cautions us to use restraint. Unfortunately, contemporary examples strongly demonstrate the continued need for toleration as a core value in the world. We watch the sorrowful refugees flow into Europe through the eastern European nations of Hungary, Croatia, and others, observing the dogged refusal to exercise restraint by the public authorities, the media, and the border officials encountering them. The actions of the many authoritarian regimes in the Middle East are exemplary of this inability to exercise restraint and

to demonstrate moderation and negotiation instead of violence against their own citizens.

Tolerance, which is similarly about the lack of persecution and the acceptance of the plurality of religions, is defined as a more “positive and proactive approach” toward difference. Such an attitude goes a step further and makes arguments about the value of the plurality of religions, presenting a case where every group is portrayed as bringing something different and valuable to the society and polity. In this sense we move beyond just a pragmatic understanding of toleration where the value is to maintain peace without too much thought given to any appreciation of difference. Sudipta Kaviraj argues that this form of toleration—he distinguishes between two forms of toleration—is about accepting the richness of diversity and recognizing that there are many paths to the worship of God.² It is acceptance at another level that urges and implies respect.³

While the word toleration evokes bearing rather than openly accepting, both of these forms of toleration/tolerance occurred in the history of many different cultures and civilizations. Within a single polity, different rulers either simply accepted or glorified difference depending on their religious and political instincts, even embracing diversity as a source of social capital to be cherished and utilized. It has also been possible for public authorities to pledge the first form of toleration and then shift to a more expansive and appreciative form. I will return to examples of these.

Toleration has also coexisted with persecution. As David Nirenberg shows in his path breaking work, toleration and persecution often work hand in hand.⁴ In many empires, for example, toleration was accorded to some groups while others were persecuted. Therefore, any study of toleration also has to consider its opposite, persecution, or even other policies, such as assimilation, exclusion, etc. Imperial states maintained rule over religious and ethnic diversity through a variety of policies, from the “toleration” of diversity and its incorporation to forced conversion and assimilation. The different outcomes were the result of religious, utilitarian, and strategic thinking with regard to diversity. Strategy might lead state elites to shift their policies: toleration and persecution could happen very close in time and take turns; states may tolerate some groups while persecuting others. Such cases indicate that toleration might be partial and certainly not a condition afforded to all.⁵ It also demonstrates that toleration in such cases might not be very deep and just strategic, for a particular moment in time. We might therefore want to pay attention to the meaning of toleration in a particular society as well as to the conditions of its emergence and maintenance.

The concept of toleration has been critiqued from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, to be tolerant in the contemporary context is seen as missing the essential dimension of according the “other” full acceptance and equality.⁶

On the other hand, toleration is seen by others as making it impossible for a full critique of cultural norms and values that might not be “appropriate” in modern liberal contexts. Despite such critiques, the concepts of toleration/tolerance have remained integral to the discussion of diversity today. Toleration is a key concept, a handle on how societies organize their diversity, maintain order, and refrain from violence. In such situations, the accomplishment of not interfering and not imposing by restraining from action is very important. To be tolerant, at any level—the state, the institutional, and the individual—is to think twice about the consequences of one’s actions vis-à-vis the other and as such bears historical responsibility for the long periods of peace between groups.

Toleration also remains crucial as it is part of the consequence of relations between people, between groups who encounter one another and learn to live with each other. As such it is constantly relevant in a global world. The historical examples and the past thinking behind toleration still offer some strategies that can be employed to provide groups and individuals with modes of communication, accommodation, and coexistence and ways to change their understanding of difference. Even with limited acceptance, the encounter between groups can be the occasion to develop strategies of mutual respect and mutual recognition. Alfred Stepan’s argument for authoritative public actors to make statements that reject nondemocratic and intolerant doctrines and beliefs in their religion and highlight the more tolerant and respectful aspects of their religion is very useful.⁷ Historically, we find that accommodation often initially resulted from ambiguous and multivocal declarations on the part of religious actors but then developed further in the encounter between groups. Here religious and “secular” leaders of great repute make the initial moments of encounter open to just toleration or more. Rituals of respect, public acknowledgement of diversity, respect for diversity, and values of pluralism are often antithetical to the deep-rooted difference that is provided by theological discourses.

The relationship between toleration and tolerance helps us construct something beyond restricted forms of acceptance into society. Toleration as the action of public authorities, twin-tolerations as the mutual acknowledgement of state and church of each other’s space and rights,⁸ and tolerance as the widespread accommodation that human beings have engaged in through centuries of coexistence are all necessary ingredients of what we are talking about. Public authorities can set the conditions for a relatively easy copresence and provide the public support for groups to coexist and flourish. Tolerance, in comparison, can be hugely significant to developing good citizens—the actions of public authorities will not be enough if the majority is unwilling to see the copresence of other groups as possible. If we accept that both are necessary and can be brought to advance the cause of interethnic

and religious peace, then we need to think about how each can be furthered and what limits can be drawn. Furthermore, we also know from historical evidence that people often do not resolve their differences; they come to see their relations in different ways. This is best said by Ingrid Creppell: "Toleration," she says, "does not come about because people 'resolve their differences' but because they come to rebalance those differences through seeing their commitments and beliefs as broader than they did at the beginning of the encounter."⁹ As such, the idea that relations are at the core of toleration and tolerance and that relations can be reorganized to produce such outcomes needs to be taken seriously.

The Ottoman Empire remains an excellent example of the intricacies of the relational approach to toleration. In its emergence, it was about relations with the Christians who were being conquered; in its institutionalization, toleration was about relations with various communities within the empire. At the end, as the empire moved toward actions of genocide, it is still possible to discuss the changes in the relations between groups, from toleration to new forms of intolerance that emerged in the nineteenth century and continued through the transition to the modern Turkish nation-state.

THE EMERGENCE OF OTTOMAN TOLERATION

At its height in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire linked three continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa, stretching from the southern borders of the Holy Roman Empire through Hungary and the Balkans to Yemen and Eritrea in the south as well as controlling much of North Africa and Western Asia. In this remarkable territorial sweep, the empire included an array of cultures, languages, peoples, climates, and social and political structures. This combination of a vast territory, a diversity of incorporated populations, and longevity makes the Ottoman Empire a perfect case through which to explore the particularities of its compact with diversity.

It would be appropriate to understand this compact with the diverse entities under the rule of empire as one of toleration. By the fifteenth century certainly, a pragmatic toleration had been set as one of the policy repertoires of the state authorities, and at particular moments a more expansive form of tolerance emerged, mostly vis-à-vis many non-Muslim groups, Christians, and Jews. Despite the ebbs and flows of such policies, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many European thinkers were convinced that the Ottomans demonstrated a formula for living with diversity that shamed the emerging nations of Europe. They clearly said so and compared their dealings with difference to those of their "Muslim" rival. These are two of the best known examples.

John Locke, in his *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) written in light of the religious struggles that engulfed Europe, made an important relational argument about the separation of church and state. He also used the Ottoman example to highlight the lack of interference on the part of the state as well as competing churches in each other's business:

Let us suppose two churches—the one of Arminians, the other of Calvinists—residing in the city of Constantinople. Will anyone say that either of these churches has right to deprive the members of the other of their estates and liberty (as we see practiced elsewhere), because of their differing from it in some doctrines and ceremonies, whilst the Turks in the meanwhile silently stand by and laugh to see what inhuman cruelty Christians thus rage against Christians?¹⁰

A century later Voltaire wrote his *Treatise on Toleration* (1763) to combat the intolerance of Catholics against Protestants primarily, but he also admired the Turks for their ability to let religious communities live according to their rites and regulations. He therefore urged his countrymen to look around:

Let us get out of our grooves and study the rest of the globe. The Sultan governs in peace twenty million people of different religions; two hundred thousand Greeks live in security in Constantinople; the muphti himself nominates and presents to the emperor the Greek patriarch, and they also admit a Latin patriarch. The Sultan nominates Latin bishops for some of the Greek islands, using the following formula: "I command him to go and reside as bishop in the island of Chios, according to their ancient usage and their vain ceremonies." The empire is full of Jacobites, Nestorians, and Monothelites; it contains Copts, Christians of St. John, Jews and Hindoos. The annals of Turkey do not record any revolt instigated by any of these religions.¹¹

Both texts refer to the Ottoman form of government and the Turk as tolerant. Toleration in the east was contrasted with the "persecuting society" of the medieval West. Especially for the Jews of Islam, historical analyses maintain that they suffered much less persecution than their brethren in medieval and Reformation Europe. A particular narrative of Ottoman Jews, expelled from Spain in the middle of the fifteenth century and invited to the empire by the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid who offered them livelihood and protection, gets repeated as proof of such policies of toleration. The contemporary literature on religious and ethnic diversity in the Ottoman Empire has adopted the term "toleration" to refer to the relatively persecution-free centuries of early Ottoman rule.¹²

The origins of an Ottoman form of toleration can be found in the emergence of the Ottoman state. The Ottoman state, through the sheer dynamism of its historical emergence and the circumstances of its expansion in a particular

region with its own social organizational dynamics, structured the boundaries that enabled the construction of a tolerant order, where both the state and local actors were keen on maintaining a smooth interreligious exchange. The leaders of the Turkic tribes that moved westward from the small Anatolian principalities understood the importance of a policy of acceptance, forbearance, and coexistence toward the Christian populations they conquered. This policy was called *istimalet*. We see in the narrative of emergence the significance of a particular kind of religious understanding and toleration as a policy of accommodation, with the precise goal that the conquered populations became incorporated.

The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans and the establishment of a new state by the first leader of the Turkic tribes, Osman, needs to be understood as constrained by the limitations of demography, geography, and cultural factors. As the Ottomans conquered the Balkans in the early fourteenth century and established footholds in the peninsula, they were significantly outnumbered by Christians. Under those circumstances, they were pragmatic in their approach to Christians, accommodating to them, providing them with privileges, and essentially trying to gain their acquiescence with a form of toleration that maintained peace and coexistence. Co-opting many Christian warriors into their ranks, they also understood the need for some sort of joint undertaking that brought Christians and Muslims together. The agency and strategy of the Ottoman frontier leaders was clear in their practice of a policy of *istimalet*; that is, an attempt to make the indigenous population look upon them favorably by offering incentives, promising generosity, and providing concessions, such as permissions to retain lands and resources. Halil Inalcik was the first historian of the Ottoman Empire to flag the importance of what was called *istimalet* (securing goodwill)—a meeting halfway, a term that was then taken up by Heath Lowry and others to develop further the concept.¹³ Since then articles and different works have demonstrated the importance of the concept by giving particular examples of the negotiations between Ottomans and Christian leaders that were based on *istimalet*.

This early form of toleration or accommodation worked in political, economic, and cultural spheres. In politics, it meant adjusting to the local leadership and incorporating them into the political system in a way that neutralized their opposition. In economic terms, toleration maintained income sources for the local leadership and the population (often lowering onerous taxes) of the conquered areas, while also developing advantages for the new ruling elite. In cultural terms, toleration meant incorporation of difference without enforcing assimilation, minimizing differences, and highlighting similarities through multivocal pronouncements that brought a relative level of appeasement to subjected populations. It is possible to look at each of these spheres to provide examples of the negotiated nature of arrangements in each.

Political and economic interests were often interconnected in the extension of privileges to those ruling elites who had been conquered. As Ottomans advanced into Byzantine territory, local power holders were keen to maintain their lands and their privileges. The church, which continued to be powerful—especially given the demise of key Byzantine state elites—often represented local authorities ready to interact with the advancing Turkic tribes. Elias Kolovos, for example, discusses the particular negotiations between the monks of Mount Athos and the Ottomans to demonstrate the way in which the notion of accommodation worked.¹⁴ After the conquest of Salonica in 1430, the monks of Mount Athos were able to secure their properties and their exemption from taxes from Murad II who provided them with a decree that ensured the continuity of their position and privileges. Tom Papademetriou, in his new work on the encounter between the Ottomans and the Greek Orthodox Church in the early centuries of Ottoman rule, shows that the interactions between the Church and the Turkic tribes started long before formal conquests of the territories. His important contribution is to stress how the principle of *istimalet* worked to allow for the incorporation of churches and monasteries into the Ottoman fiscal administration.¹⁵ These younger authors add more examples to the argument that the main concern of the Ottomans was strategic; *istimalet* was a principle of accommodation to prevent disruption of relations of production and of the flow of resources to the state. Given that, the Ottomans made little of religious differences, opening up a way for Christians to be part of the Ottoman system and to benefit from it. What initially seemed impossible, that the local bishops of the Byzantine territory would remain in the lands conquered by the Ottomans and would make various negotiated arrangements with the local emirs to continue their administrative role, happened more and more frequently:

After the fourteenth century in Ottoman controlled territory this was possible largely due to the practice of accommodation (*istimalet*) that was the first step in incorporating the entity of the church into the state structure. Going beyond the limits of Islamic law, the Ottomans integrated the Church into their administrative system. The nature of the Ottoman conquests meant that the former administrative practices were preserved and absorbed for practical reasons, and thus local populations were subdued more easily.¹⁶

Beyond the leadership and the religious authorities, the peasantry and artisans were also treated within the understanding of accommodation. Osman and his companions refused to destroy many of the lands they overtook, ensuring that the population returned and remained comfortable in their original locations. As the example of the town of Yarithsar shows, “All the villagers came back and settled in their places. Their state was better than it had been in the time of the unbelievers. When the word spread of the comfort enjoyed by these unbelievers, people began to come from other places as well.”¹⁷ Numerous other reports

confirm that peasants came back, that they were often better off than when the land was under Byzantine control, that they enjoyed lighter taxation, and that even the leadership understood that their people did not really miss them.

That early Ottomans were not boundary conscious and, in fact, had inherited a strong blend of various religious beliefs and understandings made them receptive to more heterodox forms of Islam. Such openness turned out to be crucial to the structure of opportunities present at the time. The Ottomans emerged from an Anatolian context where Christians and Muslims encountered each other in war and in peace as the Byzantines rubbed shoulders with the Seljuks. These interactions were not pointless; they taught people about each other. They forced the two religious groups to know one another at different periods and respect each other's way of life. Historians such as Keith Hopwood write about the political and cultural exchanges between the Seljuks and the Byzantine empires with examples of emperors who crossed frontiers, and cultural centers such as Konya, renowned for their multifaith characteristics from the eleventh century on. Nevra Necipoglu argues that Byzantine–Seljuk relations were not just relations of warfare but that these two groups hired each other's soldiers and mercenaries, maintained commercial relations, and married each other freely in sites of coexistence.¹⁸ It is then no surprise that Michel Balivet identifies a "Turco-Byzantine crucible" as coming about after the Seljuk invasion into Anatolia and continuing until the takeover of Constantinople in 1453. During this time, many exchanges were carried out, based on profound similarities in religion and mysticism but also in scientific, popular, and literary understandings.¹⁹

A porous boundary between Byzantines and Seljuks and later the different post-Seljuk principalities was crossed through spatial arrangements, religious mixes, and familial arrangements. An important example of mixing occurred when many followed the teachings of the dervish leader Bektashi whose tekke (monastery) in the thirteenth century became the refuge for Christian and Muslim worshippers and members of heretical orders both Christian and Islamic, such as Nestorians, Bogomils, and Shii believers. Accordingly, Islamization as it transpired was the result of a heterodox understanding of Islam, an active dervish based proselytism, and the prevalence of Islamo-Christian sanctuaries. The two faiths increasingly came to use the same sacred space, the same locales that had been consecrated to the memory of ambiguous religious figures, bringing the faithful closer together. So emboldened were Greek Orthodox theologians that they preached in conquered Ottoman territory and engaged in relations and debates with those of Islamic conviction. The story told about the Greek Orthodox theologian Gregory Palamas, who was captured but then released by the Ottomans and spread the word that when the Turks captured Byzance they would convert to Christianity, is an example of such unorthodox expectations of the time.²⁰

Beyond this initial cooperation, the local practices at the level of communities also worked to promote coexistence. The actions of the Sufi dervish leaders, who were among the frontrunners of the Balkan colonization, were especially critical to such homegrown experiences. As they moved across the Balkans, they highlighted similarities across the frontiers and brought about a local practice of tolerance between groups. Overtime, Muslim newcomers and Christians became acquainted with each other, shared secular and sacred spaces, innovated their relations, and became sympathetic to each other's traditions. A practice of state-furthered accommodation and local societal coexistence was formed through these initial centuries of conquest and contact with difference. As Stoyanov writes, "During this advance the dervish orders took a number of Christian churches, saints' tombs and sanctuaries, thus greatly contributing to the evolving process of Christian-Islamic interaction and syncretism which had already begun in Anatolia earlier in the Seldjuk period and was to reach a new scope of development and intensity in the Ottoman Balkans."²¹ Under the influence of the dervish leaders, interactions between Christianity and Islam led to the sharing of sanctuaries and traditions, especially by the rural and illiterate populations tucked away from elite influences.²²

Over time, the spread of the Islamic legal system also promoted the process of colonization and incorporation by extending a kind of *Pax Ottomanica* that ensured the security of the people throughout the region. As one of the main institutions of the state, the Islamic court and the kadi (magistrate) spread across the empire, providing an Islamic legal framework for the dissemination of justice. Used by Muslims and Christians alike, the court brought different religious groups together. Svetlana Ivanova and Rositsa Gradeva show the importance of many Muslim orthodox and heterodox religious institutions in the spread of Islam: the *vakif* (pious foundation) institutions in the colonization of the Balkans, the kadi court, and local Muslim schools and soup kitchens (*imarets*) all contributed to this swelling of Muslim Ottomans. Many imarets were known to feed Christians and Jews, spreading the goodwill of the Muslims. As Pierre Belon described in his voyage memoirs,

Taking into account that there are hardly any hostleries in Turkey let us speak about the great building which İbrahim Paşa erected in Kavala, which the Turks call a Carbasharra [sic. *Kervansaray*]. He also built a mosque next to the hostel, where all who pass by are lodged and fed. Our group was only three in number, with our horses, and we were given food for three days in succession without paying anything and without any trouble. . . . *Nobody, be he Christian, Jew, Muslim or idolater is refused here.*²³

From the early practice of *istimalet* to the establishment of Ottoman soup kitchens intent on feeding the poor regardless of their religion or ethnicity, the Ottomans conquered and established themselves in the Balkans through

mixing conquest with a particular goodwill that was at once pragmatic and benevolent. In the next centuries, they would conquer Constantinople, become an empire, expand to the Islamic lands of the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula, and emphasize their Islamic heritage increasingly more prominently. Yet an emergent understanding of moderation and toleration was to remain and generate further success in state–society relations. We see such toleration in the decrees of the sultans and its appreciation in the expressions of gratitude by various subjects.

After the conquest of Istanbul, with the zeal to gain international legitimacy, the Ottomans more self-assuredly described their pluralism as not only a pragmatic choice but a policy of positive inclusion. Mehmed the Conqueror (1451–1481) established the initial set of agreements between communities and the state, agreements that would periodically be renewed, ensuring the safety, autonomy, and protection of the non-Muslim communities in return for an extra tax, the *cizye*. The sultans continued to be legitimate Muslim rulers, and the empire was seen as a Muslim empire, yet it was understood that there was no need to impose their religion on non-Muslims living in peace in their lands and no need to turn difference into sameness. In this way, it was not that the sultans were neutral about their religion and the religion of empire, but they chose to be protective of other religions.

We have examples of such thinking in the edicts and words of sultans. One imperial decree was issued following the conquest of Constantinople in May 1453. It takes the form of a settlement (*sulh*), which was traditionally concluded following the peaceful submission of a population vanquished in war. In this case, it is in response to the delegation of envoys from Galata, whose identity is somewhat unclear from the text. They might have included representatives of the Genoese merchant community, which was settled in Galata at the time. It is called the Treaty of Galata. In this text Sultan Mehmed II extends privileges to the community for them to continue living “in accordance with their religious customs and fundamentals, in whatever way the ceremonies and fundamentals of their religion have so far been customarily enacted.” Having also ensured that their possessions would remain in their hands, Mehmed II asserted that they will be able to “go about their occupations and travel as they please and that they will be exempted and free [from the extraordinary taxes].” As was the case for Ottomans of non-Muslim origin, they would pay a tax that would be assessed on a yearly basis. And crucial to our notion of toleration, Mehmed II asserted that “their churches shall remain in their hands; they shall worship according to their customs. But they shall not ring gongs or church bells. And I shall not take their churches and turn them into mosques. And they, in turn, shall not erect new churches.” In return for their payment of tax, he further declared that he would “not take a son [from among them] for the janissary corps, and that no infidel shall be

converted to Islam without his consent, and that they shall install as their steward, for [looking after] their affairs, whomever they choose from among themselves.”²⁴

On the other hand, Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566) was famous for some of his pronouncements on diversity. For example, when asked whether Jews should be exterminated from his empire since they were usurers, he responded by asking his councilors to observe the vase of multicolored and multishaped flowers, admonishing them that each flower with its own shape and color added to the beauty of the other. He then went on to affirm that “he ruled over many different nations—Turks, Moors, Greeks and others. Each of these nations contributed to the wealth and reputation of his kingdom, and in order to continue this happy situation, he deemed it wise to continue to tolerate those who were already living together under his rule.”²⁵ Such pronouncements insisted on the sultan’s care of his subjects and his expectations that his officials would follow suit and protect all the religious and ethnic diversity of the empire.

Non-Muslims appreciated the protection that was bestowed from the highest ranks of Ottoman rule. They came out strongly in favor of the sultan, proclaiming their satisfaction and spreading the news of the favorable conditions for non-Muslims in the Ottoman lands. Isaac Zarfati in 1454 wrote the following:

I have heard of the afflictions, more bitter than death, that have befallen our brethren in Germany—of the tyrannical laws, the compulsory baptisms and the banishments, which are of daily occurrence. I am told that when they flee from one place a yet harder fate befalls them in another . . . on all sides I learn of anguish of soul and torment of body; of daily exactions levied by merciless oppressors. [. . .] Brothers and teachers, friends and acquaintances! I, Isaac Zarfati, though I spring from a French stock, yet I was born in Germany, and sat there at the feet of my esteemed teachers. I proclaim to you that Turkey is a land therein nothing is lacking, and where, If you will, all shall yet be well with you. The way to the Holy Land lies open to you through Turkey. Is it not better for you to live under Muslims than under Christians? Here every man may dwell at peace under his own vine and fig tree. Here you are allowed to wear the most precious garments. In Christendom, on the contrary, you dare not even venture to clothe your children in red or in blue, according to our taste, without exposing them to the insult of beaten black and blue, or kicked green and red, and therefore are ye condemned to go about the meanly clad in sad colored raiment . . . and not, seeing all these things O Israel, wherefore sleepest thou? Arise! And leave this accursed land forever.²⁶

In another example, a Christian subject describes the visit of Sultan Mehmed II to the Church of Saint Domenicus:

My fellow residents in Pera told me that he [Mehmed II] entered their church (St. Dominicus) and took a seat in the choir to observe the ceremony and the manner of the worship service. At his request they also celebrated a Mass in his presence . . . He discussed the laws and rites of the Christians with them as well, and, when he heard that the churches were headed by bishops, he even desired that a bishop be appointed for the care of the Christians and promised to do everything in his power to provide his unlimited assistance. But how could anyone who learned from afar of his wars and victories, of the great size of his army, and of his fame and majesty imagine him to possess such simple frankness, or, if he did hear of it, not admire it?²⁷

Such indications of sultanic respect for the communities and the positive responses of members of various communities mark moments of greater tolerance to be perhaps distinguished from the initial pragmatic toleration. Mehmed II and Suleyman the Magnificent are the two sultans who distinguished themselves in their more progressive understanding of religious tolerance. A pragmatic state–society organizational structure, however, was necessary to maintain everyday peace and order. This is what I turn to in the next section.

THE STRUCTURE OF OTTOMAN TOLERATION

For imperial states, what is behind their choice of policies of toleration is complex. It can be a religious understanding of diversity, a cultural past of living in diversity, a particular decision of rulers about their own religiosity and the protection of others, as well as a strategic response to conditions on the ground. For the Ottomans in the period from 1300 to 1800, each of these conditions impacted the particular type of toleration that emerged. The Ottomans appeared out of a frontier tradition of conflict and coexistence between Seljuks and Byzantines, with a past history of mixed ethnic and religious cohabitation in the Central Asian steppes. They brought with them an understanding of diversity. The religion they espoused, Islam, also had a particular understanding of relations with non-Muslims, which emerged as the Pact of Umar in the first centuries of the rise of Islam. The Pact of Umar (634–644) acknowledged Christians and Jews to be the Peoples of the Book and demanded the payment of an extra tax in return for peace and protection. Such historical and cultural blueprints provided the framework for engagement with the other. Consequently, in the Ottoman Empire *religion* became the prime mechanism of social and political differentiation.

A particular structure, loosely defined, based on some administrative principles yet also seemingly ad hoc was to undergird the original relational agreements and early arrangements made between rulers and communities.

Ottomans arranged religious difference through a more or less institutionalized *millet* system, which was a form of indirect rule based on religious difference vertically incorporated into the state system. Indirect rule was affected through religious intermediaries who were incorporated into the Ottoman administrative and fiscal apparatus of the empire and who acted as the interface with the communities. With such a relational framework, Ottoman state leaders settled on a level of systemic toleration that was maintained both top-down and bottom-up. That is, Ottomans regulated the boundary between Muslim and non-Muslim, ruler and ruled, while they left inter- and intra-religious boundaries to community leaders to negotiate. It was no doubt in the interests of the community leaders to maintain interethnic peace, since failing that they knew they would be replaced. The differential incorporation of religious community leaders into the state administration ensured negotiation and compromise without strong struggles between Christianity and Islam. Such cultural modality of rule also ensured that, among the non-Muslims, the dominant religious organizations, the Christian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Patriarchate, the Jewish Rabbinate, and the Jewish lay organizations did not have to struggle for their existence. They knew they were tolerated.²⁸ According to Halil Inalcik, the Orthodox *millet* was recognized in 1454, the Armenian *millet* in 1461, while the Jewish *millet* was unofficially recognized around the same time as the other two. In 1477 there were in Istanbul 3,151 Greek Orthodox households; 3,095 Armenian, Latin, and Gypsy households combined; and 1,647 Jewish households. The number of Muslim households had reached 8,951.²⁹

Once *millet* arrangements were agreed upon, they were maintained by religious or secular intermediaries from each community who enforced them by incentives and punishments. As the key brokers between the state and the *millets*, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, the Armenian Patriarch, or the many Jewish rabbis of numerous communities strategically behaved as boundary managers, maintaining peace and order through the active and efficient monitoring of relations across religious and community lines. As such they restricted and monitored relations across communities, and when conflict occurred between different non-Muslim subjects, they tried to keep such disagreements contained. Fearon and Laitin, who discuss such issues of interethnic peace, call such attempts “institutionalized in-group policing,” where leaders successfully police their own members within the community and in transaction across communities.³⁰ This intense monitoring was also successful because the ecclesiastical leadership was especially interested in maintaining boundaries for religious reasons as much as political ones and because they invested much time in learning the legal and religious systems of the others, particularly the ruling Islamic ones, in order to predict, prevent, and manage possibly detrimental breaches of intercommunal relational space.

The result was all too often more restrictive and contentious community relations than state-*millet* relations.

The character of Ottoman toleration was therefore not entirely a political and administrative product of state policy, nor was it the result of an internal organic ideological germination by Ottoman humanists who thought that toleration should be normative in society. It was rather an organizational by-product of top-down interests in legibility and interreligious peace and order and bottom-up concern for maintaining an interference- and coercion-free imperial space. The upside of such an arrangement was that once it was perceived as successful, it acquired momentum as it got reproduced and applied more widely. The downside of such an arrangement was that it could be maintained as long as boundaries were prevalent and state and social actors were powerful enough to define and preserve the rules of inter- and intra-boundary relations.

CONCLUSION

The Ottoman Empire lasted longer than many other early modern political formations, and it prospered for a long time. This longevity was in large part due to the understanding that the state had to work with religion and the diversity of identities. The state accommodated to difference rather than forced groups into its own perceived categories and boundaries. Such thinking was evident in the daily workings of the empire through the forging of an explicit relation between politics and religion and the enabling of an organizational framework, the *millet* system, based on a sophisticated and flexible set of arrangements between multiple actors. Once we see the complexity of such interrelated arrangements and the intricacies of such a large-scale system and observe that people more than ably accommodated to such complexity, we understand the manner in which the Ottomans used toleration. By the nineteenth century, the Ottomans, however, had forgotten their most precious lesson: that in a world of difference you have to accommodate and manage rather than fall prey to a Manichean view of “us” versus “them.” Therefore, an important question to ask is: can toleration that is accorded to a group also be withdrawn? We cannot speak of the toleration in the Ottoman Empire without discussing its breakdown and collapse into genocide. The societal balance of toleration was disrupted in the nineteenth century with changes in the world economy and the modern system of ideas that impacted all premodern societies. Where an equilibrium of subjecthood, imperial statehood, and diverse identities existed in a precarious balance and hierarchy, modernity imposed new ideals, and toleration that was based on pragmatism, inclusion, and respect unraveled.

The historical examples of toleration and tolerance more broadly remain important to understand since we continue to live amidst and question issues of religious, ethnic, and racial diversity in most parts of the world. Even if some homogeneity was achieved by some relatively smaller states in the twentieth century (at tremendous costs), continued globalization, warfare, and migratory patterns in the twenty-first century seem to create new mixings of and divide people. We have to find a formula that allows for diversity and promotes the understanding that there are multiple ways to believe, to respect, and to flourish. Still the best examples are historical.

NOTES

1. Peter Nicholson, "Toleration as a Moral Ideal," in *Aspects of Toleration*, ed. John Horton and Susan Mendus (London: Methuen, 1985), 158–73 at 162.

2. I will call this form tolerance in accordance with the authors of this volume, to remain in sync with the larger enterprise of the edited book. However, many have just called this a more advanced form of toleration. See, for example, Sudipta Kaviraj, "Modernity, State, and Toleration in Indian History: Exploring Accommodations and Partitions," in *Boundaries of Toleration*, ed. Alfred Stepan and Charles Taylor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 233–66. Also see Sudipta Kaviraj, "Religión, Diversidad y Conflicto," *La Maleta de Portbou* (Noviembre–Diciembre 2014): 69–73.

3. Ibid.

4. David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

5. I do not discuss this coexistence of toleration and persecution in this chapter, though it is formally discussed in my *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Many of the arguments in this short chapter make up the basis of my book, *Empire of Difference*.

6. There is a significant debate around issues of toleration. I do not address these debates in this chapter. See Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

7. Alfred Stepan, "Stateness, Democracy, and Respect: Senegal in Comparative Perspective," in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, ed. Mamadou Diouf (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 205–38.

8. I borrow the term and concept of twin-tolerations from Alfred Stepan, *Arguing Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

9. Ingrid Creppell, "Toleration, Politics, and the Role of Mutuality," in *Toleration and Its Limits*, ed. Melissa Williams and Jeremy Waldron, NOMOS 48 (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 315–59.

10. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, with an introduction by Patrick Romanell (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1955), 25.

11. Voltaire, *Toleration and Other Essays*, trans. Joseph McCabe (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1912), 23.

12. Barkey, *Empire of Difference*; Aron Rodrigue, "Difference and Tolerance in the Ottoman Empire: Interview by Nancy Reynolds," *The Stanford Electronic Humanities Review (SEHR)* 5, no. 1 (1996): 81–92.

13. Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 91–92, 112; Halil Inalcik, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest," *Studia Islamica* 2 (1954): 103–29; Halil Inalcik, "The Status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch under the Ottomans," *Turcica* 23 (1991): 407–36; Sedat Beşlîja, *Osmanlı Devletinde İstimâlet Siyaseti ve Bosna* (Istanbul: Uluslararası Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Kongresi, 2014), 2.

14. Elias Kolovos, "The Monks and the Sultan outside the Newly Conquered Ottoman Salonica in 1430," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 40 (2013): 271–79.

15. Tom Papademetriou, *Render unto the Sultan: Power, Authority, and the Greek Orthodox Church in the Early Ottoman Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

16. *Ibid.*, 75.

17. Inalcik, "The Status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch," 407–36; Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, 69.

18. Nevra Necipoglu, "The Coexistence of Turks and Greeks in Medieval Anatolia (Eleventh–Twelfth Centuries)," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 5 (1999–2000): 58–76 at 58.

19. Michel Balivet, "A La Maniere de F. W. Hasluck: A Few Reflections on the Byzantine-Turkish Symbiosis in the Middle Ages," in *Archeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: The Life and Times of F. W. Hasluck (1878–1920)*, ed. David Shankland (Istanbul: Isis, 2004), 123–33 at 124–25.

20. Aristeides Papadakis, "Gennadius II and Mehmed the Conqueror," *Byzantion* 42 (1972): 93.

21. Yuri Stoyanov, "On Some Parallels between Anatolian and Balkan Heterodox Islamic and Christian Traditions and the Problem of Their Coexistence and Interaction in the Ottoman Period," in *Syncretismes et heresies dans l'Orient seljoukide et ottoman (XIVe–XVIIIe siècle)*, ed. Gilles Veinstein, Collection *Turcica* 9 (Paris: Peeters, 2005), 75–178 at 97.

22. *Ibid.*, 98.

23. Cited in Heath Lowry, "Random Musings on the Origins of Ottoman Charity: From Mekece to Bursa, İznik and Beyond," in *Feeding People, Feeding Power: Imams in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. N. Ergin, C. Neumann, and A. Singer (Istanbul: Eren Yayınları, 2007), 69–79 at 83.

24. Ahmed Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunnameleri ve Hukuki Tahlilleri*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Faisal Eğitim ve Yardımlaşma Vakfı Yayınları, 1990), 477.

25. Mark Haberlein, "A Sixteenth-century German Traveller's Perspective on Discrimination and Tolerance in the Ottoman Empire," in *Discrimination and Tolerance in Historical Perspective*, ed. Gudmundur Hálfðanarson (Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press, 2008), 119–25.

26. Letter from Isaac Zarfati, born in Germany and settled in Edirne, dated ca. 1454, in *Letters of Jews through the Ages: From Biblical Times to the Middle of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Franz Kobler, vol. 1 (London: Ararat Publications, 1953), 283–85, cited in Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 135–36.

27. Taken from Georgius de Hungaria, *Tractatus de moribus, conditionibus et nequicia turcorum* <Traktat über die sitten, die Lebensverhältnisse und die Arglist der Turken> nach der Ausgabe von 1481 herausgegeben, übersetzt und eingeleitet von Reinhard Klockow (Cologne: Böhlau, 1993), 225–27, cited in Hakan T. Karateke, “Opium for the Subjects? Religiosity as a Legitimizing Factor for the Ottoman Sultan,” in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 111–29 at 125.

28. This argument is further analyzed in my paper entitled “Debates on Toleration in the Ottoman Empire,” unpublished ms. 2003.

29. Halil Inalcik, “The Policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek Population of Istanbul and the Byzantine Buildings of the City,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23 and 24 (1969–70), 247; Halil Inalcik, “Foundations of Ottoman-Jewish Cooperation,” in *Jews, Turks, Ottomans: A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 3–14 at 5.

30. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Explaining Interethnic Cooperation,” *American Political Science Review* 90 (1996): 715–35.