In 1915, the Ottoman Empire began the mass forced expulsion of roughly a million Armenians from Anatolia. In remarkably parallel fashion, the Russian Empire also began the mass expulsion of roughly a million Jews and Germans from the front zones during the Russian «Great Retreat» in 1915. Both these mass operations followed close on the heels of major defeats and retreats: Sarikamish in the Ottoman case, Gorlice and Przemysl in the Russian case. Both actions targeted ethnic minorities perceived to have affinity for the enemy and in both cases they were seen as commercial diasporas that impeded the economic flourishing of core Turkish and Russian nationalities. In both cases, there was a background of several decades of official complicity in popular violence against Armenians and Jews. The hostile relations between Kurds and Armenians in Eastern Anatolia and between Ukrainians, Jews and Poles in Western Russia increased the potential for violence.

This article compares Ottoman policies toward Armenians with Russian policies toward Jews and Germans during World War I, with particular attention to the motive of seizing properties of the targeted minorities. It argues that during and after the deportations (and killings in the Ottoman case), violence and displacement became means to implement the pre-existing economic nationalist agendas of permanently shifting property from one group to another. These pre-existing economic nationalist ideas quickly infused and radicalised wartime measures, turning some purportedly temporary security measures like the expulsion of minority groups into much larger campaigns to permanently transfer properties from minorities to core groups. This article also attempts to explain why two such similar cases led to very different outcomes: genocide in the Ottoman case, no mass killing in the Russian case.

1. Economic Nationalism

*Public discourse and the mobilisation of popular opinion against minorities in the Ottoman Empire*

From 1908 to 1913, men like Cavit Bey in the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) advocated free trade and the encouragement of foreign investment because «capital was necessary for the state to reach civilization».

1 However, by 1913 the CUP
was disappointed with the response of the European powers and Young Turk intellectuals such as the sociologist Mehmed Ziyâ Gökalp, the writer Ömer Seyfeddin and the historian Yusuf Akçura began to swing toward the model of the «national economy» based on the thought of the German economist Friedrich List (1789–1846). By 1913, as the CUP centralised and strengthened its grip on power, the decentralising laissez-faire ideas of liberals such as Prince Sabahattin were clearly losing out to radical economic nationalist ideas. The Young Turks’ perception of the world was a blend of their own ideological calculations on the one hand and their own visceral fear and hatred of the Armenians on the other.

Deeply influenced by contemporary European thought on nationalism, Mehmed Ziyâ Gökalp (1876–1924), a sociologist, writer, and poet from Diyarbakır, rejected Ottomanism and Islamism in favour of a unique synthesis of Muslim Turkish nationalism based on corporatist principles and opposed to liberal democracy, capitalism, and Marxism. He developed a form of «populism» (halkçılık) influenced both by Durkheim and the Russian populist movement that viewed society as an organic whole and discredited the individual. His ideological position on economics consisted of enlargement of the economy’s scale from a local to a modern developed market economy spanning the entire nation, the abnegation of class struggle and pure self-interest and neo-mercantilist state intervention. He did not oppose the private sector, but rather its distortion by what he saw as unfair acts of profiteering and usury primarily by Armenians and Greeks. The counterpart of the profiteering capitalist would be the «national merchant» (millî tüccar), whose development would be fostered by the state. For Gökalp, the enemies of «Turkism» were cosmopolitanism, prominent European and non-Turk presence, and Turkish consumption of non-Turkish culture. He argued that ultimately the key changes would have to be the result of state intervention in the economy.

The Volga Tatar Yusuf Akçura (1876–1935) founded the journal Turkish Homeland (Türk Yurdu), which he saw as the major intellectual force behind the development of Turkish nationalism. He defined the Turkish nation less along cultural than ethnic lines; he included other Turkic peoples, such as those in the Caucasus and Central Asia in his concept of the nation. Much like Gökalp, Akçura also called for the creation of a «national economy» (millî iktisad) that would foster the growth of the Turkish bourgeoisie.

The nationalist writer Ömer Seyfeddin (1884–1920) was a disciple of Gökalp and author of fictional and political short stories. Seyfeddin directs his nationalism against humanist and cosmopolitan ideas circulating in Salonica. In his

2 F. List, Das nationale System der politischen Ökonomie, Stuttgart 1841.
4 Z. Gökalp, «İktisadi Vatanperverlik,» Yeni Mecmua 2 (1918), 43, 323.
pamphlets and poems Seyfeddin claims that the capitulation treaties that preserved foreign trade and economic privileges perpetuated Turkish economic backwardness. Only abolition of the capitulation treaties would create a new class of Turkish merchants and contribute to the development of the national economy. He called on his fellow writers to write novels and stories that glorified trade and commerce, so their readers would be encouraged to aspire to these professions. Regarding the non-Muslim merchants he was clear: they were to be fully and permanently boycotted. As a result, a utopian nation state would emerge, the state of the future, ethnically homogeneous and modern.

The ideologues were aware that there would be no longevity for the CUP without a loyal social foundation. The national economic programme of influential wartime Minister of Supplies, Kara Kemal, aimed to bring Turks into the middle class and turn them into a loyal constituency for the CUP. To this end, he concluded, «the committee is struggling for the establishment of national firms, a national bank and the unification of the Muslim tradesmen and merchants in associations». Kara Kemal’s words proved prophetic during the war when Young Turks found many recruits for anti-Armenian action among Muslim entrepreneurs in the Chambers of Commerce. All in all, despite genuine ideological disagreement and personal conflicts, all these men agreed on the general tenets of Turkish economic nationalism, and the position of Armenians in the socio-economic structure was widely recognised as the key barrier to the realisation of this programme.

From 1908 to 1914, the Young Turks came to embrace policies that explicitly excluded non-Turks. Years before the war, Mehmed Talaat Bey claimed that the advanced professions in the country were all in the hands of non-Turkish and non-Muslim Greeks, Armenians and Jews. Indeed, at the height of the 1915 deportation campaign, in a telling conversation with the American ambassador Henry Morgenthau, Talaat declared that

We base our objections to the Armenians on three distinct grounds. In the first place, they have enriched themselves at the expense of the Turks. In the second place, they are determined to domineer over us and to establish a separate state. In the third place, they have openly encouraged our enemies. They have assisted the Russians in the Caucasus and our failure there is largely explained by their
Public discourse and the mobilisation of popular opinion against commercial diaspora minorities in the Russia Empire

A key goal of Russia’s modernisation drive from the great reforms of the 1860s to 1914 was to bring the country into the global economy and to encourage direct foreign investment in Russia. This was enshrined in official policies by a series of finance ministers, most prominent of which was Sergei Witte. His industrialisation strategy included an aggressive move to the gold standard in order to attract foreign investment and the temporary use of tariffs to support the build-up of Russian industry with the long range goal of embracing free trade and integrating fully in the global economy. The policies were by most measures a great success, leading to a huge influx of capital and people from abroad. Nearly half of all gross domestic capital formation from 1890 to 1914 came from foreign sources. The influx of money and capital from abroad helped drive the remarkably rapid Russian industrialisation from the 1890s to 1914.

By 1914, foreigners held 40 per cent of the total nominal capital of corporations operating in the Russian Empire. It was not just capital. Many foreign and Russian firms hired foreign managers, engineers, foremen, and experts. At the turn of the century nearly a third of all technical experts and a tenth of all administrative personnel in Russian industry were foreign citizens. In addition, Russian subjects of German, Jewish and Polish descent made up respectively 15, 10, and 7 per cent of all founders of corporations. Both Russian-subject Germans and foreign citizens comprised a proportion of corporate founders and managers which exceeded their proportion in the population as a whole by a factor of more than twelve. Russian founders and managers, by contrast, represented only 75 per cent of their proportion in the population and Ukrainians only 9 per cent. An analysis of data from corporations in ten of the largest cities in the Russian Empire found that Germans, Jews and foreigners together comprised 38 per cent of the managerial staff compared to only 37 per cent for Russians and 1 per cent for Ukrainians. Armenians and Poles were also prominent in commerce and management within their regions as well as throughout the empire. On top of it all, many of the «Russians» in commerce and industry were Old Believers or members of other religious sects. All this gave a strong

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15 Ibid., 72.
sense that capitalism and the newly emerging industrial economy were not authentically Russian. This bred resentment and created a powerful rhetorical and emotional opening for critics of capitalism on both the left and right to mobilise Russian nationalism against modernisation.

There was a long tradition of socially-conservative opposition to industrialisation among agrarian elites, from groups on the right wing of Russian politics and from the Ministry of Interior (Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del – MVD). The MVD imposed a series of restrictions on foreigners and non-Russian diasporas in the economy, portraying itself as protector of the peasantry against the intrusions of foreigners, modern capitalist development and the corrupting influences of alien middlemen, moneylenders and tavern keepers. MVD officials and right-wing political figures portrayed the abstract forces of commerce and modern economic development as embodied in the persons of the Jews and others engaged in «exploitative» trades. These attitudes encouraged popular anti-semitism and xenophobic rhetoric, and provided an important backdrop to the pogroms of the 1880s and the 1905 revolution. At times, these forces gained the support of the tsar, but from the 1890s to 1914, the ministers of finance much more often prevailed because tsar and government were strongly committed to rapid industrialisation.

A more effective challenge came not from opponents of modernisation, but from entrepreneurs, industrialists and moderate political figures who developed a set of Russian economic nationalist ideas that provided an alternative path of modernisation. Entrepreneurs from core Russian regions developed their own set of economic nationalist attitudes through their interaction with the entrepreneurs from other regions of the empire. The Petersburg and Polish business organisations represented a relatively cosmopolitan outlook favouring free trade and a liberal policy toward foreigners and minorities while the Moscow and Ural associations were more Russian in membership and outlook. Disputes between these regions raged in the press from the 1860s to the end of the regime. In these disputes, the Moscow businessmen in particular often appealed to nationalist arguments, claiming that the state should favour native Russians over foreigners. Slavophile publicists and editors lent their support and developed a fairly coherent ideology of Russian economic nationalism, which they applied to many specific issues. Their ideas can be seen as similar to those of nationalism’s classic progenitor, Friedrich List, by rejecting the cosmopolitan world economic system as inherently exploitative and calling for the development of a national economy.

After the 1905 revolution ushered in elections and party politics, the Progressive Party emerged as a formal political organisation that promoted Russian economic nationalist ideas. Along with the Moscow Merchant Society and some members of

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16 Owen, Russian Corporate Capitalism, 126–138; A. Rieber, Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia, Chapel Hill, NC 1982.
the Octobrist party, they proposed laws and pushed policies to favour Russian entrepreneurs over foreigners and Jews. However, until 1914, they remained less influential on policy than the main organisation of Russian entrepreneurs in the relatively cosmopolitan Petrograd region, the Association of Industry and Trade (AIT). The AIT strongly supported free trade and opposed restrictions on non-Russian economic activity within the empire not only before 1914, but to a large degree throughout the war years as well.

Comparisons
Before 1914 a vibrant group of Russian economic nationalist political forces had emerged. But their ideas were not nearly as accepted in the ruling elite as were Turkish economic nationalist ideas within the CUP. In the Russian case, it was the war that changed everything, bringing a sudden official embrace of economic nationalist ideas that had been largely ignored by the government in the decades prior to 1914. In both cases, the war provided a radically new context within which pre-war economic nationalist ideas could be implemented in ways inconceivable during peacetime.

2. Legal Persecution

Official Ottoman government laws and decrees directed at Armenian properties
The mass deportations of Armenians began as early as February 1915. The CUP legalised these deportations with a «temporary law» of 27 May 1915 that authorised Minister of War Enver Pasha and the army to eliminate all opposition movements, including any form of resistance, and gave them broad powers to order deportations. The law did not include any clauses on Armenian properties.\(^{17}\)

On 30 May 1915, the cabinet legalised the 27 May decision with an expanded law that this time explicitly referred to Armenians and their property. It aimed to deport Armenians that «have engaged in dangerous activities such as collaborating with the enemy, massacring innocent people and instigating rebellions».\(^{18}\) On the one hand, the 30 May 1915 order included clauses to protect or compensate Armenians for immovable and landed properties, and on the other, it also included a clause that allocated the Armenian lands to «migrants». In the law, the term «migrant» was not defined, but in practice it referred to the people who fled or migrated from the Balkans and the Caucasus. All other properties, including olive orchards, mulberry orchards, vineyards, orange groves, workshops, road houses, factories, and stores were to be sold by auction. Finally, the decision included the establishment of «liquidation commissions» to administer the abandoned properties, and to control their distribution to migrants.


\(^{18}\) BOA, Meclis-i Vükelâ Mazbatasi 198/163.
The Ottoman government adopted a secret order to inform the local government about the management of the Armenian properties immediately after the deportation decision on 10 June 1915. Commissions were formed to carry out the management of properties and lands belonging to Armenians, and the type, amount, value, and name of the owners of the goods taken under protection were to be registered in detail. Movables would be preserved in the name of the owners but those movables whose owners were unknown would be registered and stored in the name of the village. Perishable movables, crops and animals would be sold at auction by the commissions. The proceeds would be preserved in the finance office in the name of the previous owners. Church properties would be stored after they were registered and listed.

The CUP put these procedures on paper primarily in response to international pressure – most importantly from Turkey’s allies. Germany and Austria-Hungary had many Armenian creditors and intervened directly in the process through their consulates. Livid entrepreneurs submitted many complaints to the consulates demanding compensation for their losses. The consulates in their turn criticised the Ottoman government and wanted to end the liquidation of the Armenian properties because there were no legal articles to allow their sale.

The many ties of German companies and banks to individual Armenians had to be severed before those Armenians could be dispossessed, deported and murdered. In a memorandum of 4 July 1915, German Ambassador Wangenheim warned the Young Turk government of the losses and damage that German firms would certainly incur as a result of the persecutions. Cognisant of the fact that the Germans would defend only their own interests, Talaat temporarily postponed the deportation of Armenians who owed German firms and banks money, but did not pause it for others. The German government then emphatically claimed that it would hold the Ottoman government responsible for any German losses. When Talaat ignored this protest, the Germans lodged an official complaint on 13 September 1915. Talaat, in typical CUP fashion, responded by swiftly drafting the «temporary law» of 27 September 1915.

This law empowered the commissions to liquidate the abandoned properties and to settle the debts and credits of the persons who were «sent elsewhere». To eliminate the possibility of preventive and fictitious transactions, the law cancelled all property transactions including cession of the property up to fifteen days before the

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22 Armenians in Ottoman Documents, 70–71.
24 Takvim-i Vekâyi (State Gazette) no. 2303, 14 September 1915.
deportation date. According to a German embassy official, German legal scholars and Istanbul’s business circles had «dramatically but not inaccurately» named the law «legalization of pillage». The Austro-Hungarian Chamber of Commerce reached similar conclusions, namely that the Young Turk government had abolished the rights of both creditors and debtors relating to Armenians. Despite these protests, the CUP continued to liquidate Armenian properties through these laws.

On 8 November 1915, a new regulation provided much more detailed information about the rules and duties of the commissions and the immovable properties of the Armenians. While it still claimed that Armenian church properties were being preserved, this regulation moved a step closer to nationalisation by explicitly granting the right to use the abandoned schools and monasteries to the Ministry of Education and by giving the commissions expanded powers to auction off movable properties of the churches and monasteries. All these transactions were to be recorded in three different books (defter). In 1918, an amendment declared that any expenditure on the (surviving) deported Armenians would come from the income of the Armenian properties held by the state. In other words: the deportation of Armenians was being funded with Armenian property.

On top of all these laws and regulations, on 11 August 1916 the government «modified» the official 1863 regulation on the status of the Armenian millet arguing that «[t]his statute has been the principal cause of the power of the Armenian revolutionary organisation and the effectiveness of its activity». According to the CUP, the Armenian National Assembly was an institution that «concentrated power» in its hands, and all members of the clergy were purportedly members of revolutionary parties. All ties with the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin were broken off and the Patriarchate was moved to Jerusalem. As a result of these measures, the Armenian millet ceased to exist as a collective institution and its members were relegated to a legal black hole.

Official Russian government laws and decrees directed at enemy alien properties
When war broke out, the foreign minister declared that the person and property of enemy subjects would not be affected by the state of war. However, Russia quickly moved away from this stance, in part in response to her ally Great Britain, which enacted the «Trading with the Enemy Acts» and pushed her allies to freeze German assets abroad, ban transactions with enemy countries and oversee firms owned by enemy subjects. On 22 September 1914, a Russian decree prohibited

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25 PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 99, Bl. 9–12, German embassy to Ottoman Foreign Ministry, 5 October 1915.
26 Takvim-i Vekâyi, no. 2343, 28 October 1915.
27 Takvim-i Vekâyi, no. 2672, 1 October 1916.
29 «Russkie poddannye v Germanii i Avstro-vengrii vo vremia voiny,» Russkie vedomosti, 22 July 1914, 2.
enemy citizens from acquiring any property or business in ownership, lease or management.  

As in the Ottoman case, the military played a central role in pushing the campaign for the seizure of minority properties in close relationship with its role in driving forward a programme of mass deportation. This was facilitated by the declaration of military rule throughout a vast territory including Poland, the Caucasus, Petrograd, the Baltic provinces, Finland, and large parts of Central Asia and Siberia. Military authorities were given the authority to deport individuals or entire groups from these regions. They were also given wide powers over the economies of these vast territories, including requisition (which included payment) up to the most extreme measure of confiscation (which brought no compensation whatsoever). The military quickly began to use these powers.

In the first months of the war, the army and the MVD ordered the arrest and internment of German, Austrian, and Ottoman subject men age 18 to 45 throughout most of the empire. Approximately 50,000 individuals were interned as a result of these orders, which were based initially on the security concern that male enemy citizens could be enlisted to fight against Russia if allowed to leave the country, or could be recruited for espionage if allowed to remain free within the Russian Empire. Nearly every belligerent power enacted comparable measures to intern this category of enemy citizens. However, in the Russian case, authorities expanded the operations to much broader categories, and the question of their property quickly became an important part of the operations.

By February 1915, the military had issued comprehensive orders to deport all enemy subjects, including women and children, from the entire area under military rule. It was not just a military operation. Civilian authorities paved the way for both deportations and expropriations of property with an important September 1914 MVD circular that removed the right of enemy citizens to defend themselves in civil courts and voided all international agreements and conventions protecting enemy subjects. A subsequent ruling of Russia’s highest court confirmed that enemy subjects were denied access to the courts, but that Russian subjects could sue enemy subjects with trials to be held without the presence of the accused. This opened the door for local institutions and individuals to seize the properties of these deported subjects with little fear of legal consequences.

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32 E. Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I, Cambridge, MA 2003, 122; RGVIA, f. 1759, op. 4, d. 1603, ll. 1.
33 Garf, f. 102, II, op. 71, d. 102, ll. 1–125.
34 RGIA, f. 1483, op. 1, d. 14, l. 151; L. M. Zaitsev, Poddanye vrazhdennogo gosudarstva i russkie sudy, Kiev 1915.
Indeed, as the deportations expanded, the question of the properties of the deportees rose to prominence. Already in the first month of the war, the Red Cross, the military and the MVD began to sequester the properties and businesses of deported enemy subjects. Individuals and Russian firms both began to denounce enemy citizens and Russian-subject Germans in hopes of shutting down business competitors, settling personal scores or acquiring properties for themselves. Mass circulation newspapers ran stories about enemy alien owned firms, accusing them of disloyalty and demanding sequestration or liquidation.\textsuperscript{36}

The Chairman of the Council of Ministers Ivan Goremykin became alarmed at what he saw as a «pogrom-like atmosphere regarding alien property» that was threatening to get out of control. But he was not able to do much to curb the independent actions of the army, which had full power to continue sequestering and confiscating properties in the area under military rule. Also, rather than stop the seizure of enemy properties, Goremykin tried to channel the process in a legal direction by issuing the decree of 11 January 1915 that required the liquidation of small and medium size enemy-citizen owned commercial and trade firms. Of the 3054 firms affected, half were exempted due to the Slavic ethnicity of the German and Austrian subjects or Christian faith of the Ottoman and Bulgarian subjects, 1360 were sold (at steeply discounted prices) by their owners and 479 were dismantled by state inspectors.\textsuperscript{37} Far from appeasing the public, this law only encouraged the press to increase the volume and acerbity of its demands for more extensive measures. The public mood boiled over in a massive three-day riot in Moscow in May 1915 that targeted German and foreign businesses, causing massive destruction. Only the deployment of the Moscow garrison finally brought an end to the violence that had gotten so out of hand that the city police chief was afraid to intervene, thinking it could spark a complete loss of authority as had occurred in 1905.\textsuperscript{38}

In the wake of the pogrom, rather than back off, a series of even more aggressive laws expanded the liquidation of enemy subject properties first to large scale industrial firms, then to force the liquidation of shares owned by enemy subjects in joint stock companies. Along with these measures of the civilian government, the army continued to use its powers to harass, investigate, sequester, and liquidate enemy subjects owned firms in the area under military rule. Once sequestered, these firms were typically transferred to individuals, state or social institutions to maintain uninterrupted production. This in turn created a strong lobby for changing the sequestration from a temporary measure into a permanent transfer of ownership.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian, 64; L. Deeg, Kunst & Albers Wladiwostok: Die Geschichte eines deutschen Handelshauses im russischen Fernen Osten 1864-1924, Tübingen 1996, 189.

\textsuperscript{37} RGIA, f. 23, op. 28, d. 3178, ll. 1-2ob.


\textsuperscript{39} RGIA, f. 1483, op. 1, d. 22, ll. 89–91.
During the process of sequestration or liquidation, government inspectors and «liquidation committees» were assigned to each firm. The Ministry of Trade and Industry informed these officials that «the main goal of the liquidation programme was to transfer firms and shares to new owners who would secure [...] Russian trade and industry from dependence upon and the influence of enemy subjects and capital».40 The ministry explicitly stated on several occasions that it saw the liquidation programme as a permanent means to Russify industry in Russia, not as a temporary wartime measure.41 The inspectors and committees were given very broad powers not only to transfer the ownership of the company to state institutions or to reliable «Russian» hands, but also to fire and hire employees and to change the firms in other ways. Through all their actions, they were encouraged to pursue Russian economic nationalist goals of gaining greater Russian control over firms and the economy as a whole. Towards that end, they often paid particularly close attention to the relationships of the firms under their control with Jewish firms and creditors, and in some cases forced the firing of Russian-subject individuals of German, Jewish or Polish background.42

In rural areas, a parallel set of measures targeted the lands owned by both German subjects and Russian subjects of German descent. The question came to the fore quickly on the heels of a series of targeted mass expulsions of German farmers (colloquially referred to as «colonists») from broad expanses of territory near the front. Tens of thousands of Germans were deported in a series of actions along the front zone from September to November 1914. The army command claimed that the Germans sympathised with the enemy and could be recruited to fight or spy for Germany if left in the theatre of military operations. However, these concerns quickly took a back seat to the goal of seizing German land in the countryside. In December 1914, the Governor General of Warsaw and military commanders in the region ordered the expulsion of 200,000 German colonist males from the ten Polish provinces and the sequestration of more than 20,000 properties. In January, a conference of representatives of the military and the governor general of Warsaw drew up a set of rules that expanded the targets of the mass action to the entire German colonist population, including women, children and the elderly. This expanded the target population to over 400,000. However, the conference excluded the nearly 100,000 Germans living in urban areas from the order. Why? To some degree, the German colonists were an identifiable separate group from urban Germans, traditionally distinguished by their membership in the soslovie (estate) legal category of «kolonist». But the most important explanation was the government’s desire to expropriate German landholdings permanently.43 In all, as many as 300,000 Germans were ordered

40 RGIA, f. 23, op. 27, d. 673, l. 8.
41 RGIA, f. 1276, op. 12, d. 1464, ll. 1–12.
42 GARF, f. 102, d. 307, d. 122, ll. 2–3; RGIA, f. 1483, op. 1, d. 9, l. 383.
43 GARF, f. 215, op. 1, d. 524, ll. 102–1031ob (Special conference, 25 January–2 February 1915).
to leave areas near the front for the Russian interior and the motive of seizing their property was openly discussed right from the start. If prevention of espionage were the real concern, then urban Germans would logically have been the primary target. Instead, the army focused exclusively on the rural Germans and their landholdings. Already on 28 January 1915, the State Council heard a proposal that colonist lands be transferred to injured soldiers who had received medals of distinction, and that they should be preserved for «members of the Russian nationality (Russkoi natsional’nosti)». The military continued to press for this idea throughout the war, and the issue was taken up in the press. Commentators on the left tended to propose giving the lands to landless and smallholder peasants while some on the right stressed that land should instead be given to Russian gentry in order to gain social and political power vis-à-vis the Poles in the western borderlands.

In the midst of the mass deportations, the civilian government stepped in with an important law of 2 February 1915 that required German colonists (including those with Russian subjecthood) living within 160 kilometres of the western and southern borders of the empire to sell their properties within the next year. The complexity of this radical measure gave some of the moderate ministers in the government pause, but when the tsar removed them and replaced them with reactionaries led by Minister of Internal Affairs A. N. Khvostov, the new government expanded the measures to include 21 provinces of European Russia. The laws were introduced in the context of extensive public discussion and agitation for the transfer of lands permanently from Germans to Russians. Although owners were compensated, the prices for land in German areas slumped to as little as a tenth of their pre-war value, making the forced sales only slightly better than outright seizure of the properties. The civilian measures to expropriate German lands decisively turned what could have been temporary expulsions of a minority into a permanent transformation of the ethnic composition of land ownership in a large swath of the empire.

3. Physical Violence, Confiscation and Looting

The Ottoman Case

The destruction of the Ottoman Armenians can be seen as a complex result of four important factors: the development of Turkish nationalism, the loss of territory in the Balkan wars of 1912–1913, the Young Turk coup d’état of 23 January 1913, and the outbreak of the First World War. These political forces converged in sparking a severe radicalisation of anti-Armenian policy by the Young Turk political elite.

The most immediate trigger of the genocide can be traced to the uncertainties of the Great War, but the genocide took on its own logic and momentum. The first
phase was the genesis of the genocidal process: the threat of invasion by the British in the west and the Russians in the east. It is no exaggeration to state that the effect of these threats on the Ottoman political elite was nothing short of apocalyptic. The perception of an existential threat spurred persecutions in the winter of 1914–1915 when nearly all Armenian civil servants were fired from their positions. The second phase developed out of the exaggerated fear of an organised Armenian insurrection, which reached its boiling point when Allied forces launched the Gallipoli campaign in the night of 24 April 1915. In the same night, Armenian elites were arrested across the Ottoman Empire. In Istanbul, 235 to 270 Armenian intellectuals, clergymen, physicians, editors, journalists, lawyers, teachers, and politicians were rounded up and deported to the interior, where most were murdered. Other provinces followed suit. This effectively decapitated a community of their political, intellectual, cultural, and religious leaders. A third phase followed when the regime on 23 May 1915 ordered the general deportation of all Ottoman Armenians to the Syrian desert. Recent research has confirmed again that these orders served to render an existing policy of persecution more explicit and more violent, escalating into mass murder of about a million Armenians. What made the massacres genocidal is that the killings targeted the abstract category of group identity, in that all Armenians, loyal or disloyal, were deported and massacred.

The genocide consisted of an overlapping set of processes: elite homicides, deportations, massacres, forced assimilation, destruction of material culture, and expropriation. Although these dimensions of the genocide differed and were carried out by different agencies, they converged in their ultimate objective: destruction. By the end of the war, the approximately 2900 Anatolian Armenian settlements (villages, towns, neighbourhoods) were depopulated and the majority of their inhabitants dead. The process required an extensive bureaucratic apparatus that perpetuated a legal façade during the dispossession of Armenians.

The proclamation of war and the abolishment of the capitulations were important factors in the qualitative leap to the elimination of the Armenians from the Ottoman economy. The war disrupted international trade and production. The war requisitions, in particular, hit the peasantry hard. Disgruntled landowners whose harvests were virtually confiscated hid their crops, bribed officials and resisted in ways comparable to the later dekulakisation campaigns in the Soviet Union. Şevket Pamuk has
argued that the shortages caused by the war provided an opportunity to the Young Turks’ economic nationalism. They eliminated the low rate ad valorem tariff structure in favour of higher specific tariffs on selected goods to support domestic industry, declared a moratorium on payments on the external debt held by French, Germans and Britons, abrogated the capitulations, and subjected all companies to «Ottoman law». Law had increasingly become a political tool in the hands of the CUP. The abrogation of the capitulations was a unilateral breach of international law and a catalyst that channelled high levels of power into the Young Turks’ hands. «Turkification» could now be systematised into a comprehensive empire-wide policy of harassment, organised boycotts, violent attacks, exclusions from professional associations and guilds, as well as mass dismissals of Armenian employees from the public service and plunder of their businesses in the private sector.

The CUP regime launched both the deportation and the dispossession of Armenians well before the promulgation of any laws or official decrees. The categorical decree of 23 May 1915 and the deportation law of 27 May 1915 were issued after the deportations had already begun. Decrees and laws merely served to unite the hitherto diverse practices and render the overall policy more consistent. Telegrams to various provinces ordering the liquidation of immovable property were followed by the streamlined programme of 10 June 1915 that established the key agency overseeing the liquidation process – the Abandoned Properties Commission. These were not yet christened «Liquidation Commissions» but nevertheless they mostly fulfilled that function.

Officially, there were 33 commissions across the country, and in towns without any, the local CUP chapter often took charge of the tasks. These consisted of making an inventory, liquidating, appropriating, and allocating Armenian property. The most detailed and reliable information on these commissions comes from Germans stationed in the Ottoman Empire. For example, Deutsche Bank staff members recognised that the Ottoman Bank collaborated in the endeavour. From its correspondence with the provinces, the German ambassador concluded that the confiscation process went through two phases: the direct liquidation of all Armenian property by the Abandoned Properties Commission that was not plundered and the transfer of the revenues to the Ottoman Bank that held responsibility for the money. According to André Mandelstam, in 1916 a sum of 5,000,000 Turkish Lira (the equivalent of 30,000 kilograms of gold) was deposited by the Ottoman government at the Reichsbank in Berlin. This astronomic amount of money was most probably the aggregate of all Armenian bank accounts, as well as the total sum gained from the

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53 PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 96, Bl. 1–3, Deutsche Bank Istanbul branch to Germany embassy, 17 November 1915.

54 PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 96, Bl. 98–105, Hohenlohe-Langenburg to Erzurum, 3 September 1915.
liquidations in the provinces.\textsuperscript{55} Furthermore, German diplomats argued that the commissions worked in tandem with the Grand Vezirate, the Finance Ministry and the Justice Ministry.\textsuperscript{56} The entire operation was supervised by the Interior Ministry, which was tasked with an enormous degree of coordination and recordkeeping. These records have survived and offer the historian a unique opportunity to trace the process of dispossession.

Several empire-wide decrees discussed above sketched the contours of the confiscation policy, but from the outset it was primarily an effect of the deportations and there was probably no blueprint for it written by Talaat and his consorts. Throughout 1915 and 1916, the Interior Ministry issued hundreds of directives, orders, decrees, and injunctions to provincial, district and city authorities. During the deportations, it recorded the names, professions and properties of the Armenians before expropriating them and liquidating their immovables. On 29 August 1915 it sent a circular telegram summoning authorities to auction Armenian abandoned property for the benefit of the local Turkish populations.\textsuperscript{57} On 1 November 1915, the Ministry ordered the drawing up of lists of «Armenian merchants from provinces who have not yet been transported to other regions», including details on their trading firms, real estate, factories, the estimated worth of all their belongings, information on their relatives living abroad, and whether they were working with foreign business partners.\textsuperscript{58}

For Ottoman Armenians, the outcome of these policies was fundamentally disastrous. With the deportation orders, Armenians were now singled out and robbed of their right to own any property. In Kayseri, for example, promulgations on property were hanged in public places on 15 June 1915. The notice read:

\begin{quote}
Leave all your belongings – your furniture, your beddings, your artefacts. Close your shops and businesses with everything inside. Your doors will be sealed with special stamps. On your return, you will get everything you left behind. Do not sell property or any expensive item. Buyers and sellers alike will be liable for legal action. Put your money in a bank in the name of a relative who is out of the country. Make a list of everything you own, including livestock, and give it to the specified official so that all your things can be returned to you later. You have ten days to comply with this ultimatum.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

In Sivas, announcements were made at churches that Armenians should take as few belongings with them as possible and make arrangements for simple modes of trans-

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 98, Bl. 4, Vice-Consul Ziemke to Istanbul Consulate, 16 November 1915.
\item \textsuperscript{57} BOA, DH. ŞFR 55/330, Interior Ministry to all provinces, 29 August 1915.
\item \textsuperscript{58} BOA, DH. ŞFR 57/241, Interior Ministry to all provinces, 1 November 1915.
\item \textsuperscript{59} M. M. Derdarian, \textit{Vergeen: A Survivor of the Armenian Genocide}, Los Angeles, CA 1996, 38.
\end{itemize}
Economic Nationalism, Confiscation, and Genocide

Portations, such as mules or small carts. At this moment of announcing the deportations, personal jealousies would locally play up in an atmosphere of denunciations. John Minassian, a survivor from Sivas, noted in his memoirs: «If a Turk envied your success in business or did not like you, he reported a concealed weapon in your basement.»

In Erzincan 1915, a city situated on the banks of the upper Euphrates, was home to 26,000 Armenians, mostly artisans, officials, merchants, and farmers. The fertile mud brought by the river makes good soil for growing the region’s famous apricots and grapes. In June 1915, the Armenians of Erzincan were deported and most were murdered in the Kemah gorge, a narrow and steep ravine downstream where the calm Euphrates of the plain gives way to a roaring river. A Red Cross doctor witnessed the plunder of the locals:

The Armenian women everywhere were sitting in front of the houses and offered all their household effects for sale. All went away for a song. Farmers and Kurds charged into the crowded Armenian quarter and dragged off household items by the donkeyloads, among which were highly-loaded oxcarts. Obviously, the buyers came from all across the city. On 10 June the picture changed. The city was empty.

The government’s reassurances to the Armenians were mendacious. On 6 January 1916, Talaat ordered an empire-wide decree about the businesses confiscated in the genocide. The order read:

The movable property left by the Armenians should be conserved for long-term preservation, and for the sake of an increase of Muslim businesses in our country, companies need to be established strictly made up of Muslims. Movable property should be given to them under suitable conditions that will guarantee the business’ steady consolidation. The founder, the management, and the representatives should be chosen from honourable leaders and the elite, and to allow tradesmen and agriculturists to participate in its dividends, the vouchers need to be half a lira or one lira and registered to their names to preclude that the capital falls in foreign hands. The growth of entrepreneurship in the minds of Muslim people needs to be monitored, and this endeavour and the results of its implementation needs to be reported to the Ministry step by step.

62 PAAA, Botschaft Konstantinopel 96, Bl. 66–68, report by a Red Cross doctor in Erzincan, 29 June 1915.
63 BOA, DH. ŞFR 59/239, Interior Ministry to all provinces, 6 January 1916.
This order constitutes perhaps the most unequivocal document attesting to the intentions and policies of the Committee of Union and Progress. It encapsulates the ideology of «Turkification» and «National Economy» in a single, explicit, incontrovertible formulation.

The Russian Case
April and May 1915 were in many ways remarkably comparable for the Ottoman and Russian Empires. In April, the German and Austrian armies broke through Russian front lines at Gorlice, beginning a series of catastrophic defeats for Russia and the beginning of what would become known as the «Great Retreat». The military press and the conservative mass circulation civilian papers both published wild unsubstantiated reports about espionage committed by Germans and Jews and demanded radical retaliatory action. The Russian military command responded by ordering mass expulsions of Jews and Germans from areas near the front to the Russian interior.

The public mood swung in a violent direction in response to news of Russian defeats, but also in reaction to news of the sinking of the Lusitania on 12 May, which led to a massive three-day anti-German riot in London. Popular anger was stoked by papers and the Moscow Merchant Society, both of which claimed that the laws to liquidate German-owned businesses were not being implemented rapidly enough. On 26 May, a massive anti-German riot consumed the city for three days. Although earlier Jewish pogroms had much higher death tolls, the monetary damages were probably greater than in any other pogrom in Russian history, mainly because so many stores and factories were ransacked along with private apartments.\textsuperscript{64}

The Moscow pogrom scared the MVD. Reports on the mood of the population continued to claim that anti-German, anti-foreign and anti-Jewish tensions were so high that pogroms and other anti-alien violence could erupt in areas throughout the empire. But the police put significant effort into preventing a repeat of the Moscow riot, and successfully prevented anything approaching the scale of violence of the May riots.\textsuperscript{65} Instead, the regime pressed ever more radical official measures of liquidation of the German role in the economy.

The most violent incidents were not in cities, but in the front zone, in areas under the direct control of the military. From July 1914 to April 1915, there were a handful of cases of forcible expulsions of Jews from areas close to the front zone. Right from the start, these expulsions often included violence and looting directed against Jews. However, there was a quantum shift in the scale of forced expulsions of Jews during the Russian «Great Retreat», beginning in April 1915. As the Russian army retreated,
it came across thousands of Jewish settlements in shtetls, towns and cities in the Polish, Ukrainian, Latvian, and Bessarabian areas of the empire. The expulsion orders reached a crescendo in May 1915, almost exactly at the same time as the CUP order to deport all Armenians was issued. On 15 May 1915, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Ivan Goremykin, reported that «a slew of recent expulsion orders would apply to three hundred thousand Jews».  

In reading through the internal correspondence, it is striking how quickly the operation reached a dangerous turning point, where it could quite conceivably have turned genocidal. The hostility of the entire Army command toward the Jewish population, the heightened sense of wartime threat and crisis, the anti-Jewish attitudes of the soldiers and the local populations, and the particularly violent role of Cossack cavalry in the operations to expel Jews, all pointed toward a potential for the mass expulsions to tip into mass killing.

The expulsions themselves occurred within a context of rapidly escalating violence on the ground. The motive of looting was present from the earliest expulsions of Jews, and as expulsions increased in scale and frequency in early 1915, seizures of property became more frequent. The Council of Ministers became alarmed and imposed strict rules requiring the Ministry of State Properties to sequester and take German, enemy subjects and Jewish properties under its control for later redistribution. While this decree brought looting of German and enemy subjects under control (with some exceptions), local authorities were unwilling or unable to achieve the same for Jewish property.  

With the truly mass scale expulsions of Jews in April and May 1915, the looting and violence against Jews reached new levels. A study of 54 pogroms in the front regions found that four fifths of the pogroms were led by Cossack units. Local Polish, Ukrainian and Russian peasants often participated in the looting by waiting outside villages with carts until the Cossacks finished a violent round of beatings, hostage-taking and rape. This Cossack violence was most often directed toward attempts to extort cash and loot from the Jewish population. Frequently, Cossacks would take prominent community leaders hostage demanding payments for their release. The army also took hostages as insurance against Jewish spying.  

Local newspapers spread rumours of Jewish coin hoarding, and a number of pogroms began when a Cossack, soldier, or local went to a Jewish store and was turned down when demanding to change paper currency for precious metal coins.  

Articles in the press, denunciations, petitions, bureaucratic memos, and the correspondence of army commanders mixed the language of «German dominance» (zasil'e) with that of «Jewish dominance». The press encouraged the idea of expropri-
ating the property of Germans, Jews and foreigners to «core» national groups, fostering a strong sense that the property of the forcibly expelled minorities in the front zone was unprotected.

Particularly dangerous was the problem posed by the existence of a welter of restrictions on Jewish settlement anywhere to the East of the line defining the Pale of Jewish Settlement. That line ran roughly along the border between Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before a series of annexations from 1772 to 1795. The problem was that the military orders demanded that Jews resettle outside the area under military rule. That left only half of Poltava province and a portion of Ekaterinoslav province as valid destinations for the resettlement of the hundreds of thousands of Jews being expelled. Subsequently, the MVD convinced the army to allow resettlement in some additional areas under military rule, but it was still a very narrow band of territory for such a massive influx of deported and impoverished Jews.70 Arguably, the most dangerous potential tipping point came when the first trains of Jews began to arrive in these provinces. On 8 May, the Poltava governor wired the military that eleven trains with 10,738 Jews had arrived in Poltava and with more on the way, there was no way they could house and feed such a mass of impoverished Jews.71 Governors of the five internal provinces allowed for resettlement frantically appealed to the Minister of Interior to halt the deportations.

But in sharp contrast to the Ottoman case, precisely at this dangerous moment the civilian government intervened. Chairman of the Council of Ministers Goremykin wrote a crucial memo to the tsar arguing that a flood of expelled Jews into the cities of a few provinces would impoverish Jewish communities, cause epidemics, depress wages in cities to which the Jews were sent, exacerbate Christian-Jewish tensions, and lead to pogroms. Goremykin hardly made the case on humanitarian grounds. He argued that the most important reason to slow the rapidly escalating scale and violence of the mass expulsions was the reaction in allied countries and West European financial circles, which, he claimed, «are under strong Jewish influence».72 The Minister of Foreign Affairs stressed the importance of strong relations with ally Great Britain and neutral potential ally the United States – relations that were threatened by the Russian measures against Jews. Civilian government opposition to the army’s Jewish policies and the objections of Russia’s allies likely helped prevent even worse atrocities and played an important part in slowing and limiting the mass expulsions.73 This contrasted sharply with the Ottoman case. At critical moments such as these accelerations of deportation policies, the Ottoman civilian government (represented by Interior Minister Talaat Pasha) overruled all complaining governors and exacerbated the living conditions of Armenians by continuing to de-

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70 RGVIA, f. 1759, op. 3, d. 1422, l. 7; RGVIA, f. 1932, op. 12, d. 67, ll. 35, 40, 43.
71 RGVIA, f. 1932, op. 12, d. 67, l. 95.
72 GARF, f. 1467, op. 1, d. 635, ll. 10–11.

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port them. For example, when in the critical spring of 1915 convoys of Armenians were moved into Konya province, Governor Celal Bey wired the Ministry of the Interior to provide financial resources for housing and maintenance of the Armenian deportees. But the governor only later found out that this proved to be a naive request. In his 1919 memoir, he wrote: «Instead, they sent some official who was appointed «Director for the Settlement of Immigrants», who in reality was out to deport the Armenians with their women and children.»

The violence against Jews certainly did not end. Cossack and army pogroms continued to accompany mass expulsions from the front throughout the summer of 1915. However, the tsar’s policy of turning in a moderate direction and working with society gave moderate ministers and political parties greater voice and influence. The minutes of the civilian Council of Ministers meetings over the summer show that the army’s violence and expulsions of Jews was a major issue of concern for them. Also important was the decision to end the restrictions on Jewish settlement to the interior of the Pale of Settlement. This decision eased the pressures to find a «solution» to the bottlenecks in moving Jews out of the military zone. According to Peter Gatrell, two fifths of all displaced Jews moved to areas of the Russian Empire that had previously been closed to them.

The local dynamics influenced the course and intensity of these violent processes of expropriation and expulsion. In some regions, local political or social elites expedited and intensified the genocidal destruction steered from above. The top political elite recruited local power holders for their ends and conversely local power holders manipulated political elites to further their own interests. Massacre and pogrom developed from this mutual dependence and tacit pact: local elites depended on the centre to secure a power base and the centre depended on local elites to carry out violence. This dynamic gave rise to a mobilisation process in which men participated in mass killing in exchange for economic and political benefits granted by the regime. In both the Russian and Ottoman Empires, the relationship between the expropriations and the violence was very likely a two-way process: the government could distribute Jewish, German or Armenian property to local elites in exchange for support for the victims’ marginalisation. In this win-win situation, the regime could buy the loyalty of upcoming Russian and Turkish middle classes by appealing to their sense of economic self-interest. Thus, while ethnic hatred significantly contributed to the destruction, it does not satisfactorily explain the mobilisation of perpetrators. Rather, maintaining and increasing power or upward social mobility shaped the patterns of recruitment for and participation in violence.

75 P. Gatrell, _A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War I_, Bloomington, IN 1999, 146.
4. Conclusion
This article has revealed a remarkably comparable situation in the two empires, suggesting that a powerful brew of economic nationalism with rising national resentments against specific minorities created the potential for genocide. Then, during the war, from February to May 1915, mass deportations of Jews, Germans and foreigners from the Russian front region proceeded in eerily similar ways to the deportations of Armenians from the Ottoman front zones. In both cases, these operations were quickly linked to economic nationalist agendas and to the simple, base motive of looting the unprotected minorities. The potential for genocide ran high in both cases, yet at a crucial moment in May 1915 the Young Turks turned deportation into genocide in the Ottoman Empire while Russian authorities did not take the fateful step from deportation and forced expulsion to mass killing.

The leading explanations on the Russian side as of now are several. Russia’s allies Britain and France pressured the Russian government to back off the repressions of Jews in the front zone. Russia’s potential ally, the then neutral United States, also put strong diplomatic pressure on the Russian government to improve its policies toward the Jewish population. The Council of Ministers discussed these pressures as having great diplomatic and potentially financial impact on the war effort and even discussed a letter from J.P. Morgan in a full council meeting at a crucial moment in late May. Less cynically, international law had a real and surprisingly deep tradition in the Russian Empire, and the 1905 revolution brought strong progress of the rule of law and a civic identity that transcended the relatively narrow base of ethnic and economic nationalist appeals. Conservatives generally distrusted any kind of nationalism – Russian included. In short, there was a wider range of alternative concepts of the nation at war that appealed both to the government and people than was the case in the Ottoman Empire. Neither in the halls of power, nor on the streets did an ideology of core nationalism gain anywhere near the support that it did in Turkey.

By contrast, the Ottoman Empire neither adhered to the principles of international law the Russian imperial government attempted to respect, nor did it have the international pressure for restraint and moderation that Russia’s allies exercised. Indeed, when the war broke out, the first decision the Ottoman government took was the unilateral abrogation of all relevant international agreements, including the capitulations, the 1914 Agreement on the eastern provinces and the Treaties of Paris and Berlin. From November 1914 to May 1915, as the persecution of Armenians mounted, the CUP government ignored any and all appeals and warnings about their obligations under international law. Most famous among these was the 24 May 1915 Allied declaration that the Ottoman government would be held accountable for «crimes against humanity». Moreover, Austria-Hungary’s October 1915 invasion of

Serbia included ruthless violence against Serb civilians including mass executions, destruction of material culture and forced expulsion. When Bulgaria joined the Central Powers in the war, within weeks its army was being accused of serious violations of human rights in eastern Serbia, including mass murder, rape, expropriation, and destruction of historical monuments and libraries. All of this happened a year after the German invasion of Belgium, which had included massacres of unarmed enemy civilians and destruction of Belgian architecture. With allies like these committing their own violations, the Ottoman government came to consider itself no longer bound by international treaties or laws and effectively used this lack of pressure as a carte blanche.

Both the Russian and Ottoman governments wanted to end their perceived dependence on foreign capital. But whereas the Russians mitigated this nationalist and ideological impulse with pragmatic concerns, the Ottoman government thrust ahead with the expropriation of the Armenians regardless of the economic consequences. The hardened Turkish nationalists in the CUP were committed to a narrower definition of the nation, no matter the cost.

However, the comparisons are not limited to differences. In April-May 1915, both the Ottoman civil authorities and the Russian military command chose not to calm down and de-escalate the situation, but rather to radicalise the situation by formally bringing the permanent fate of the properties of the target groups into the process. But whereas Russian policy did not move from pogroms to genocide, the Ottoman government’s violence quickly veered towards genocide.

Official encouragement and tacit approval of pogroms meant that both individuals and firms began to denounce Germans, Jews, Armenians, and Greeks in hopes of shutting down business competitors, settling personal scores or acquiring properties for themselves. The collaborators on the ground benefited from the witch-hunt atmosphere in society created by the government. These two cases show both the importance of economic nationalist ideas and the less coherent motive of looting on the ground once mass operations got under way. They also show that international factors can be decisive in facilitating or preventing a dangerous situation from moving to genocide.

Economic Nationalism, Confiscation, and Genocide: 
A Comparisation of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 
during World War I

This article analyses the development of the Ottoman and Russian governments’ economic persecution of the Armenians and Jews during World War I. It will chart how this policy moved from boycott to discrimination, into confiscation and outright plunder, resulting in economic ruination for the victims. It identifies the main currents and developments of this ruthless policy and how it affected Armenian and Jewish communities. So far there exists no comparative treatment of the expropriation of Ottoman Armenians and Russian Jews during World War I. This article aims to fill that gap by looking at the confiscation process through a combination of approaches, focussing on the development of the legal process, explaining the ideology of economic nationalism, and concretely demonstrating the policy on the ground.

Wirtschaftlicher Nationalismus, Konfiszierung und Gewalt: 
Ein Vergleich zwischen dem Osmanischen und Russischen Reich während des Ersten Weltkrieges


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