Minority groups in Ottoman Turkey before 1856: different arrangements of the Jews and the Christians under *Millet* system

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Abstract

One of the exceptionalities of the Middle East is the existence of sectarian identities along with late modern institutions, such as nation state. While modern states in the region struggle for coexistence, imperial authorities, especially Ottoman, was relatively successful to endure its rule over different identities as minority across region. It is recorded that the Ottomans' long history as imperium is supported by their ability to develop and implement system to incorporate different identities under their rule known as millet system. Historical exploration as used in this paper suggests that the concept was adopted from Islamic teologic tradition in respond to the reality of mixture society in newly conquered territories which resembles the character of the Ottomanism itself since Suleyman. The mundane aspect of the millet system can be seen from the way of the Ottomans' rulers handling the major minority groups such as Greeks and Jews based on their personal or social and economic capabilities. One of the obvious beneficial relations with the groups

is the ability to do trading and fill positions in foreign services that lead particular group to enjoy better position in bureaucracy and society. The differences, in fact, have influenced the arrangement and treatment of the Ottoman rulers towards them over time which were also heavily affected by political changing in the case of the Greeks for example. Therefore, the arrangements of the minority groups are based on mutual benefit that suits both objectives which was able to last for centuries. However, it is also found that the Greeks and Jews' ability to survive is heavily based the character of Ottoman bureaucracy which is patrimonial. In that case, patronage relation is important and acknowledgement on merit and achievement is rarely found.

Salah satu aspek yang membuat kawasan Timur Tengah berbeda adalah keberadaan identitas-identitas yang bersifat sektarian bersamaan dengan dibangunnya lembaga-lembaga modern, seperti negara bangsa. Sementara konsep negara terkini di kawasan itu berjuang untuk mempertahankan kehidupan ssecara bersama, penguasa-penguasa kerajaan seperti Ottoman, dapat dikatakan berhasil mempertahankan kekuasaannya atas kelompok-kelompok masyarakat kecil dengan identitas yang berbeda di berbagai wilayah. Tercatat bahwa sejarah panjang Ottoman sebagai sebuah kerajaan didukung oleh kemampuan mereka untuk membangun dan menerapkan sebuah cara yang dikenal dengan *millet* untuk menerima dan menyerap identitas yang berbeda di bawah kekuasaan mereka. Penelusuran sejarah seperti yang dilakukan di dalam tulisan ini menyarankan bahwa istlah *millet* itu diambil dari tradisi teologi Islam sebagai tanggapan terhadap realitas kemajemukan masyarakat di daerah-daerah yang baru ditaklukkan dan ini pada dasarnya menggambarkan ciri khas dari cara pandang Ottoman sejak Suleyman. Unsur keduniaan dari sistem tersebut dapat dilihat dari cara penguasa-penguasa Ottoman menangani kelompok-kelompok minoritas yang utama seperti Yunani dan Yahudi yand didasarkan atas kemampuan perorangan ataupun kelebihan ekonomi dan sosialnya. Salah satu contoh nyata hubungan yang saling menguntungkan dengan mereka adalah kemampuan untuk berdagang dan mengisi jabatan-jabatan di kantor hubungan luar negeri yang membuat sebagian dari mereka menikmati posisi yang lebih baik di pemerintahan maupun masyarakat. Perbedaan-perbedaan itu, pada kenyatannya, telah mempengaruhi pula penanganan dan perlakuan penguasa-penguasa Ottoman terhadap mereka dalam jangka waktu yang lama yang juga

dipengaruhi oleh perubahan politik seperti yang terjadi pada kelompok Yunani. Karenanya, penanganan yang berbeda terhadap kelompok-kelompok minoritas itu pada dasarnya saling menguntungkan dan hal itu sesuai dengan kebutuhan kedua belah pihak dan mampu bertahan dalam kurun waktu berabad-abad. Selain itu, tulisan ini juga mengungkap bahwa kemampuan kelompok Yunani dan Yahudi untuk mempertahankan posisi mereka di hadapan penguasa bergantung kepada karakter birokrasi Ottoman sendiri yang bersifat patrimonial. Dalam kasus ini, hubungan yang bersifat patronase menjadi penting dan pengakuan terhadap prestasi dan pencapaian kerja dapat dikatakan jarang ditemukan.

Keywords: *Ottoman; Millet system; Minority groups; Patrimonialism; Greeks; Jews*

Introduction

One major concern for scholars on the Middle East is that the complexity of its society that brings into problematic nature of state formation. It brings to the question of the effectiveness of nation states as a concept established in the region after the collapsed of Ottoman Empire the operative formulae to rule their inhabitants live in particular border. Even though it is proven that state, as adopted from modern European conception, may categorically survive it is not difficult to find dilemmas in many Middle Eastern states in order to sustain.[1] The current campaign of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria that has called themselves Islamic State) has once more raised the sectarian problem -this time between Sunni and Shi'a- which has failed to address by Shi'a dominated government in post-Saddam Iraq.

For many scholars, one factor that should be focused on is the character of the society in the Middle East which is influenced by tribalism. Unlike their counterparts in Europe, the failure to absorb them into the state and the states' inability to deliver social and economic development

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[1] Adham Saouli, *The Arab State: Dilemmas of Late Formation*, Routledge, 2012.

has triggered the emergence of communal identity to stand up against any political establishment.[2] Therefore, the existence of tribal society to create distinctive identity and communal bound should be considered as significant to the understanding of the region.

It is argued that, in general, monarchy and emporium in the region have failed to create effective power to rule over the vast area of the Middle East in a relatively durable time. In that context, many scholars believe that expansion of the tribe's authority into wider area has brought challenges to cope with cultural and social differences of the new area. Only two of the major tribe groups are known to successfully develop enduring powers, which are Turkish and Persian tribes.[3]

Ottoman Empire that had been built based on Turkish chiefdom is an interesting case as it ruled vast area in the Middle East as well as part of Europe, mainly Balkan. As consequence, the Ottoman leaderships had to deal with different societies including Christians. It is more unique that the Empire homed hundreds of thousand Jews who fled from Andalusia and regarded the empire as safe home with economic opportunities.[4]

Hence, examining the way of the Ottoman leaderships treated differences is important to understand problematic nature of enduring political authority over different identities which may be reflected into the current occurrence in the Middle East. At least its ability to sustain imperial power over different regions for centuries can offer something to look at when any authority has to deal with complex social identities.

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[2] Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris,1991, 2-3.

[3] Thomas J. Barfield, "Tribe and State Relations: the Inner Asian Perspective," in Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris,1991, 155-156.

[4] Avigdor Levy, "Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire: Lessons for Contemporary Coexistence," *Near Eastern and Jewish Studies*, Brandeis University (September 2000), 13.

To focus on the objective, this essay will discuss different arrangements of the Ottoman government towards the Christians (especially Greek and Armenian) and the Jews. By looking at historical account of the millet system, this essay finds that different arrangements to minority groups are mainly influenced by the social and economic capabilities of each minority group in dealing with patrimonial character of the Ottoman state before the *millet* system was fully diminished in 1856. It will also see the significance of those factors in the relation of those communities with the government.

Minority group and *Millet* system

The existence of minority groups in the Ottoman Empire has been well known as automatic consequence of plural society of conquest lands. The expansion of the Empire, in the period of 14th to 17th century, had opened new lands in European Balkan and former Abbasid area in North Africa and Arabian heartland, where which the inhabitants were plural in term of ethnicity and religiosity. In European Balkan, for example, even though most of the population was Christians they were divided into several ethnic groups such as Greek and Slav. For the new rulers who were certainly Muslims, reigning over those different communities proved to be intriguing. However, it was also proven that they were capable of ensuring their authority for centuries. One of the reasons for the success is by the arrangement of the different character within Ottoman population provided doctrinally in Islamic law based on the concept of *dhimmi* or the People of the Book. In practice, this concept also gave the ruler opportunity to managed minority groups as conquered people or community on ethno-religious bases[5] Moreover, the concept of *dhimmi* regulates the rela-

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[5] Bat Ye'or, , *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: from Jihad to Dhimmitude: Seventh - twentieth Century*, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996, 243.

tionship between the Muslim authority and the non-Muslim community under protection and provides high degree of freedom for non-Muslim to practice their religions and implement their own laws.[6]

Inspired by the law which had also been practiced during Ummayad and Abbasid periods, Ottoman governments then established a system known as *Millet* through which different groups could be recognized in their official arrangements and documents. *Millet* system itself was not well recognized before the 19th century, but basically the arrangements of the Ottoman governments toward them were not different to each other. The major minority groups in the Ottoman Empire were Greek, Slavs, Armenians, and Jews, while others were not too significant in term of number and their roles such as Arab Christians or Vlahs.[7] In concept, the division of *dhimmi* itself is actually quite confusing because it was not only based on a single factor but also overlapping in practice.[8] Greek, Slav, and Armenian had similar religion which was Christian Orthodox, but they were not grouped into a single community. Rather, the Ottoman authorities embedded ethnicity into religiosity to create ethno-religious identification for the minority groups, especially in dealing with the Balkans.[9]

The system had been practiced during the Ottoman reign started roughly in the 18th century under the official name of *taife kā-firlerin*. It

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[6] Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: the Functioning of a Plural Society*, New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980, 5.

[7] Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristic*, London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 23.

[8] Dimitrios Stamatopoulos, "From Millets to Minorities in the 19th-Century Ottoman Empire: an Ambiguous Modernization," in Steven G. Ellis, Guðmundur Hálfdanarson and Ann Katherine Isaacs, (eds.), *Citizenship in Historical Perspective*, Edizioni Plus – Pisa University Press, 2006.

[9] Victor Roudometof, "From Rum Millet to Greek Nation: Enlightenment, Secularization, and National Identity in Ottoman Balkan Society, 1453-1821," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Volume 16, Number 1 (May 1998), 11-48.

was then officially recognised as *millet* system to put the Greek-Orthodox as the first group under the term. In the 19th century, other millet groups were also put into place, for Jews and Armenian, to create three minority groups that worked within the Ottoman state. For some, the system has been seen as discriminatory rule due to its restrictive nature based on differences, ethnicity, and religiosity.[10] One of the limitations, in theory, was the impossibility to gain equal access to higher positions in the government the Ottoman Empire. Such claims are in fact contested by other arguments saying that they were in fact similar with other groups within Muslim community such as Sunni, Arab and Syiah in front of the Ottoman ruling elites to control their tensions or conflicts for the state's benefits.[11] It is also argued that the establishment of the millet system was part of the Empire toleration to engage with the Ottoman society where which religious boundaries, state action, and inter-religious community relations were organized to maintain religious tolerance for such a long period of time.[12] Therefore, it is more sensible to look at the existence of the millet groups as part of the way the Ottoman ruling authorities to rule diverse society after defeating Byzantine Empire completely in 1453 and entering the Balkans decades before.

Millet system and social structure of minority groups in the Ottoman empire

As mentioned before, the implementation of millet system is a continuation of previous *dhimmi* system in Ummayad and Abbassid periods. Hence, it is in fact not the original creation of Ottoman tradition. Otto-

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[10] Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi : Jews and Christians under Islam*, Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson U.P, 1985.

[11] Karen Barkey, "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 1/2, The New Sociological Imagination II (Dec. 2005), 12-13.

[12] Karen Barkey, "Islam and Toleration"..., 9.

man rulers saw it as part of religious doctrine which was practically useful; so they arranged and institutionalized it and gave more attention on its practice in the Ottoman society.[13] It was surely related to the fact confronted by the Ottoman on the plurality of many conquest territories, especially in Balkan. They found that people in Balkan had strong and long tradition with Christian Orthodox, namely the Greeks and the Slavs. Besides them, there were also Armenians who were also adherents of Christian faith who emigrated from eastern Anatolia when the Ottomans moved into Constantinople. Jews also lived scatteredly in many regions but they were concentrated in Istanbul, especially after hospitalized by Ottoman Sultans to avoid horror *inquisition* in Spain in the 15th century.

Over centuries, Ottoman authorities themselves were developed into more bureaucratic administration and tried to strongly control the society by developing more centralized authority. To reach the goal, they developed hierarchical administration system but it was set differently for each community. In dealing with minority groups, the Ottoman rulers found the millet system was useful because each community had been granted exclusive authority to deal with internal religious affairs. It was the heads of the community who were in control. Therefore, each minority group had a religious leader who received trust and respect from members of the groups because of its religious authority. Every community could build and maintain their worship place with some restrictions. Usually, they could not build their worship place higher than mosque or build a new one.[14] However, they were allowed to run their own education system with curriculum and language based on their preferences. They could also develop their own social institutions depended on their

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[13] Avigdor Levy, "Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire...," 13.
[14] Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam...*,243.

financial abilities by collecting internal tax to support their social institutions.

For the Ottoman rulers the structure of leadership within the minority groups provided opportunity to effectively control them by engaging the religious leaders into bureaucratic system. Therefore, as part of hierarchical bureaucrat they had to implement Ottomans' policies especially those that were not related to religious affairs.[15] Tax was one of the main targets for the Ottomans as they needed to generate revenues from the conquest lands. It can be said that the policy of Ottoman authority toward the minority groups or communities was liberal in term of security and tax. Ottoman rulers supported the leadership in every community and gave them autonomy to select their own leader. The government then asked for their responsibility especially on tax that they collected internally.

Tax for the government was collected in groups depended on how many members within each community as well as their economic capabilities. The collection of the tax was conducted by the communities' tax officer to meet the amount of collective tax according to negotiation between the government or local authority and the community. Besides, the community had autonomy in law, which was applied only to the member of the community on relations among them such as family matters, marriage, divorce, and financial transaction.

In the residential areas there were some places used as public sphere where every community could interact. They usually met in bazaar where traders, bankers, shops owner, merchants, craftsmen, and buyers converged to run market to do trading and transaction on goods as well as money. Other important public sphere was government offices that were set up to provide services for every community. Therefore, by having such minority groups with their own bureaucratic structures and social

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[15] Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam...*,243.

functions the Ottoman society was relatively segregated.[16] They could even run their own businesses and other informal professions based on particular identity. For example, due to their ability to speak European languages the Jews were mainly engaged in international trade and foreign relation and civil service in general. The Greeks and the Armenians did have similar capacity as farmer so they end up mainly in the agricultural activities.

Number of population varied in every region. The Jews mostly lived in urban areas such as Istanbul as their skills fit with urban activities while the Greeks and Armenians lived in rural areas as well in urban areas. However, the Greeks were more concentrated in European parts of the empire to run their agricultural sites in the western part of the empire and produced wheat. In contrast, the Armenians initially lived scatteredly in the eastern Anatolia before emigrated to the western side. In some areas such as Macedonia and Bosnia, there was no majority community.[17] Based on census conducted in 1831, total number of Muslims who lived in the European Balkan was 3,776,000 and they were divided into Albanians, Turks, Bosnians, Tulemans and Pomaks. It was recorded that Christian population in the area was 6,310,000; most of them are the Slavs and the Greeks plus the Albanians and the Vlahs. Meanwhile, the total number of the Jews was 600,000 as indicated from the census in the area and included Istanbul as the capital of the Empire. In Istanbul, it was estimated that the proportion between Muslims, Greeks, Armenians, and Jews was 56 percent, 22 percent, 15 percent, and 4 percent. Even though there was effort to record Ottoman population, accurate and correct data on population before 1856 was still difficult to rely on because the census itself was not reliable in recording the whole popula-

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[16] Avigdor Levy, "Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire...," 13.

[17] Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914...*, 21.

tion. Data given in 1831 was also confirmed as inaccurate[18] and influenced by the reduction of Ottoman territories as well as a result of prolonged wars with Russia and Prussia.

Ottoman empire: between patrimonial and bureaucratic state

As this paper argues, different arrangements received by minority groups were influenced by the character of the Ottoman Empire itself. It is fortunate that scholars had given their attention to the empire as part of their analyses on bureaucracy and German sociologist, Max Weber, is one of the leading figures in this effort. It was in his effort to explain about bureaucracy that had inspired him to examine Ottoman bureaucracy as comparative analyses to European empires. For Weber, Ottoman state fits with his category of state as it was identified as patrimonial state.

In general, the Ottoman state was supported by three main groups namely the military, the religious leader, and the scribal or civil service.[19] They played significant role in the state's power exercise in centraland local government. In central government, the rivalries between the Palace and Sublime Porte (government's office) were obvious to 'negotiate' the real power holder. The Porte was leaded by Grand Vizier and usually supported by ministers. It was recorded that the number of ministries in the Porte was 12 and the nature of the ministries was to redistribute the authority of Grand Vizier.[20] In local government, governors played important role to manage the territories and supported by cavalries (*sipahi*) as local administrator and scribal. The function of scribal in local government was to collect revenue or tax from farmers who lived in the territories.

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[18] Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914...*, 21.

[19] Carter V. Findley, "The Administrative Legacy and Modern Middle East", in Carl L. Brown, *The Imperial Legacy*, New York: Colombia University Press, 1996, 155-169.

[20] M. E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Middle East*, London: Longman, 1987, 100.

In explaining the character of the Ottoman state, Weber used the term patrimonial as he referred to the personal ties of the sultan with his apparatuses. In such patrimonial formation like Ottoman, Weber stated that it "makes administrative and military organization a purely personal instrument of the master to broaden his arbitrary power."[21] The Sultans exercised power by maintaining the balance of rivalries between interest groups. In that system, personal relation and balancing rivalries were then fundamental in the Ottoman political system. Hence, the Sultans were the major decision maker and they would always make decisions based on their consideration on loyalties of the apparatuses as well as their benefits to his power. Furthermore, the selection of officials in civil services was based on loyalties to the rulers and it was implemented mainly into the local government. It is not surprising that Weber then named the Ottoman bureaucracy as '*sultanism*' to underline the importance of sultans' personal consideration.

Therefore, bureaucracy of the Ottoman was vulnerable to plunge itself to substandard conditions in running state services. Some of the bad characters of Ottoman bureaucracy in the central power were noted by scholars as increasing of corruption, mastering nepotism, making the offices as hereditary position, working inefficiently, and having weaker control to local power.[22] The local bureaucracy had similar reputation if not worse. In local level, the governors behaved like autocrats and did nothing to the central government except collecting tax. They were also lazy, greedy, corrupt, and tend to abuse their positions to gain their personal interest.[23]

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[21] Max Weber in Halil Inalcik, *the Ottoman Empire: the Classical Age, 1300-1600*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973, 113.
[22] Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914...*, 94.
[23] Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914...*, 94.

However, according to Cornell Fleischer, Ottoman bureaucracy was not heavily bureaucratized in static condition or without any development into better bureaucratic practices.[24] According to his point of view, it is a fact that bureaucracy in Ottoman was "traditional." However, after centuries from its first formation in the 16th century, there was also tendency to develop modern bureaucracy as a consequence of expanding territories and financial problems. Those factors have forced the government to establish professional bureaucrats to deal with the problems. So, Fleischer indicates that there were "an independent career track" and growth of consciousness to manage the bureaucracy based on *kanun* or law.

In this characteristic of bureaucracy, minority groups must deal with the government and mostly with the local officers. Most of the contacts with the officials were in tax collection issues. Many of the tax collectors were the Greeks and the Jews and they obtained status as government officers as well. However, in the corrupted bureaucracy of Ottoman, entrusted calculation of tax was not easy to have if not impossible. In the case of disputes between community and tax collectors, the minority group could bring the case to the capital. Usually, they would ask the influential wealthy family related to the community in Istanbul to solve the problem by interfering the authority.[25] This kind of resolving the problem was possible in the client-patronage relationships as linked with the bureaucratic character. In this case, the Jews community was excellent by maximizing wealthy Jews personal relationship in the capital with government officers.

To some extent, Fleischer was right to indicate the changing of bureaucracy in Ottoman Empire. However, in fact, lack of efficiency, weak

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[24] Halil Inalcik, *the Ottoman Empire: the Classical Age, 1300-1600...*,114.
[25] Aron Rodrigue, (ed.), *Ottoman and Turkish Jewry: Community and Leadership*, Bloomington: Indiana University, 1992, xi.

of their economic condition, and pressure from European powers had forced government officials to start thinking of modernizing it. After destroying Janissaries as an obstacle of Mahmud II's willingness to modernize the empire, a new class of bureaucrat had rapidly grown in the capital and local regions. The reform was officially started by two decrees that were announced in 1839 and 1856.

The first decree to initiate the reform was the Decree of Gulhane in 1839, which became the starting point of Tanzimat, an effort to reform military and bureaucracy in order to catch up with European advance industry and technology. It extended the warranty of "life, honor, and property" of all the people in the Ottoman even the millet system in recognizing ethno-religious differences was not diminished yet. To maintain that assurance, the need of secular law was evident because the *shari'a* could not be implemented to the non-Muslims. The decree, in fact, noticed the rivalries between the traditional supporters of the empire and those who were in favour with the initiation of *kanun*. The prominent supporters for the latter were officers in bureaucracy. They were mostly at the top position of the government who were benefited from the system of patrimonial based on personal relation and loyalty.

For minorities, this decree was a chance to enter the administration without considering their ethno-religious background. In fact, there was no substantial changing until the Crimean War in 1853-1856. However, despite of that insignificant condition, the Sultan made a regular schedule to meet the leaders of the minority groups, especially with the Rabbi of Jews. Few of the Jews had been appointed to several government positions as well as to help the courts. Some of them, then, were appointed to fill the representative council in district of municipality.[26] This oppor-

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[26] H. J. Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East 1860-1972*, Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1973, 10.

tunity was one of the direct and fundamental impacts of the decree for minorities, which were arranged in 1840. There was also an indication that a small number of Greek army doctors and Armenian building designers remained their previous middle class position.[27] However, the position was informal and not too significant to the policy making process.

Minorities golden era and state arrangements

In practice, the recognition of the minority groups was not only based on religious concept of *dhimmi*, but also the ability to deliver service for the state. It is recorded in the history that the government had appointed members of minority groups as government officers. For example, after the expulsion of Jews community in Spain from 1492 to 1502, the Ottoman maintained the Jews quite well and employed them as government advisors and in many cases as employers. As a result, their position was relatively better than the Christians and it had protected them from any possible attacks from the Christians.[28] This treatment made condition of the Christians worse than the Jews. Therefore, identity was not only the only basis to deal as arrangements received by those two different communities, as shown in the case of the Jews and the Christians, were based on what each community could offer. It was proven that the ability of the Jews to speak variety of European languages and manage financial business had given more opportunities to be in high rank governmental positions than the Christians. Thus, there was tendency to treat them differently because of their knowledge and usefulness to the government.

The Jews played important role in the 15th and 16th century of the Ottoman Empire. Their skills in finance and trading have attracted Ot-

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[27] Carter V. Findley, "The Administrative Legacy and Modern Middle East"..., 32.

[28] Lucien Gubbay, *Sunlight and Shadow: the Jewish Experience of Islam*, New York: Other Press, 2000, 105.

toman rulers to invite them to the empire and run economic activities. The expulsion of the Jews from Andalusia or Spain has been one of the main factors for them to come to many Ottoman territories. Mehmed the Conqueror and continued by Bayazid invited them to develop Istanbul as a new capital of Ottoman. It was estimated that 150,000 Jews has immigrated to Ottoman region, mostly to Istanbul. Besides their ability in finance and trade, the Jews also introduced European medicine to Turkey. At that time, an Italian Jews became personal physician to Mehmet the Conqueror and raised his position to obtain great influence at the royal court. His 'career' in the palace was followed by other Jews as trusted friends, intimates, and even advisors of the Sultans.[29] Their skills also attracted the government to employ them in technical and financial administration and most of them worked in Custom Office.[30] Some of the officers in the courts of Sultans and governors functioned as physician like Moshe Hamon and Josef Hamon in the 16th century, bankers, and advisors of Sultans like Josef Nasi, and civil servants in the beginning of the 19th century such as Gabriel Benbenisti.[31]

Other Jews' skill was their knowledge of many European languages. Because of that knowledge, the Ottoman government employed them as interpreters, foreign policy advisors and even sometimes as diplomatic envoys to European countries. They also had widely networks around the world in international finance. In industry, they mainly monopolized textiles production from raw materials to the trade of textiles itself. The Jews were able to maintain that advantage until conditions began to change in the middle of 17th century as a result of economic pressure of Europe and the weakening of the Ottoman.[32]

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[29] Lucien Gubbay, *Sunlight and Shadow...*, 106.
[30] Lucien Gubbay, *Sunlight and Shadow...*, 107.
[31] H. J. Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East 1860-1972...*, 9.
[32] Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914...*, 94.

The golden era of Jews eroded after economic pressure from European capitalists. The Jews who depended on trade, industry, and commerce suffered from the economic decline of the Ottoman international trade and also security and uncertainty in order. Some Jannissaries, who survived after its demolition in 1826, terrified Jewish distribution of products and economic activities. Jews economic roles declined furthermore after European capitalists replaced their position in trading by Christian as well as internal intrigue in the palace to displace them from confidants of the Sultans.

Their wealthy eroded vividly and they could not send their children to better education to maintain their knowledge. Their children then lost their ability to speak foreign language. It was obvious that the Jews were less useful than other minorities, especially Greek. The Greeks in the middle of the 17th century were prominent in advance skills such as doctor after studied in European universities. Even though the Sultans had special intention on Jewish community they were in fact powerless in dealing with bureaucratic intrigues between interest group inside the body. They had lost high positions near the Sultans to give them advice and input regarding Jews condition as well as their positions as interpreters and other well-paid functions employed by the bureaucracy.[33] They could not escape from local officials' cruelty and the Jews were the most vulnerable community to suffer the condition. It was even worse when the public and the officials blamed them for the Ottoman economic decline and they started to deteriorate them.

The impact of economic declining was serious in the government level. The Jews were one by one being moved from the government posts and replaced by the Greeks and Armenians. At the beginning of the 19th

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[33] Avigdor Levy, (ed.), *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton, N.J.: Darwin Press; Washington, D.C Institute of Turkish Studies, 1994, 95-96.

century they still had significant role in economy; but after that the Greeks and Armenians forced them into substandard conditions in allmost all sectors. In short, the decay of Jews communities in the Ottoman Empire was based on several factors from very high taxes, criminal acts by Janissaries, and the absence of forceful and respected leaders among Jews.[34]

Character of the Ottoman state, which was patrimonial, was also the main factor of the declining of Jews in the inner circle of the palace. The case of David Passi when he enjoyed Murad III confidence to make him as his advisors in international relations was the pre-eminent example of vulnerability of the Jews in the high rank position. From 1585, Passi supplied the Sultan several compilation of political analysis. He was invited by the Sultan frequently in several negotiations and made him as the essential sources to make decision for foreign policy and even for domestic policy.[35] In this case, Passi showed his ability to supply important data for the Sultan. Advisor was an informal position in the palace and his role was fundamentally based on Sultan's personal favor. In the formation of patrimonial bureaucracy of Ottoman, none could deny personal consideration of the Sultans. However, his strategic position ended up when Sinan, an architect and top rank bureaucrat at the palace, influenced Murad III by using Islamic norms against Jews. Sinan succeeded to influence the Sultan and he agreed to exile David Passi in Rhodes Island.

The Greeks then enjoyed better position after the declining of Jews economic and political roles until the Greece independence revolution broke up in 1821 until 1823. Even before 1821, their positions in the empire have already been quite decent compare to other communities,

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[34] According to Dumont in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire...*, 211.

[35] See Pal Fodor's description on David Passi in Elif Ozgen, The connected world of intrigues: the disgrace of Murad III's favourite David Passi in 1591, *Leidschrift*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (April 2012).

and even with the Muslim Turks in some areas. They had a reputation as a community who represented the whole Christian community in the former Byzantine Empire in Balkan and Asia Minor which was due to their close relationship with the Patriarch, spiritual leader of Orthodox Christian.

They were able to obtain bureaucratic position without converting to Islam. It was quite unusual in the Ottoman standard because minority groups were mostly prohibited from administrative positions. Initial roles of the Greeks in the administration were as interpreters, especially in the Foreign Office. Following of decades of services, they were requested to represent Ottoman authority in Wallachia and Moldavia when those two areas became the vassal with wider autonomy. They began working as interpreters since 1711 and lasted until the political turmoil in Greece in 1821 that led to an independent Greece state. With strong anti Greece sentiment among the Ottoman rulers, their role in the empire was simply vanished as most of the Greeks were forced to leave the empire.

Apart from that, the Greeks also brought European capitalist system to the empire since European tended to replace Jews with them in doing economic transaction.[36] The Greeks were closer to the Europeans and they wanted them to become major but independent traders to distribute European products. The raise of their economic roles can be traced from the Greeks population in Izmir. In the year of 1830, there were only 20,000 Greeks compare to 80,000 Turks in the city. The composition changed dramatically in 30 years after when the Greeks population reached 75,000 while the Turks reduced to 41,000.[37] The changing of the population was partly the direct impact of trade booming, which attracted many Greeks to come and replaced the Turks in many ways. They

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[36] Karpat, *op.cit*, Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914...,* 46.
[37] Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914...,* 95.

did not have any obligations regarding their position as *dhimmi* in the *millet* system. Under the system, there were no obligation to enter military service and they also paid less tax than the Turks. Other factor why they become more dominant wasthe Turks' effort to limit the number of their family in order to avoid higher tax, consumption, and possible military service as well. Meanwhile, the Greeks could gain enough resources to enlarge their family numbers and sent their children to high quality universities across Europe.

After that upheaval of the Greece independence in 1821, the Greeks lost their respect from the mass and in particular the government. This event had brought new balance within the society as well as the government and raised better situation for the Armenians. The decree of *Hatt-i Sherif Gulhane* and followed by *Hatt-i Humayun* modestly restored their position in economic sector and more significantly government employments had to share with the Armenians until the last period of the Ottoman era.[38] The Armenians then replaced their position as the government lost their trust to the Greeks as both had similarities in term of religious identity. The differences between them were in the social organization and culture. While the Greeks were later known as urban middle class, the Armenians were known both in the urban activities and rural economic basis. The latter played important part of agriculture in the eastern, and later, western part of Anatolia where they maintained their traditional custom.

The important role of the Armenians was also determined by the condition of Muslim community in general. Their tax was reduced which in many cases were less than the Muslims had to pay. Previously, they had to pay higher than or at least equal compare to Muslim, and then in

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[38] According to Charles Issawi in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire...*, 275-276.

1845 their tax reduced into 35,000 piastres for 1,000 families compare to 65,000 for Muslim.[39] At the same time, the government increasingly employed minority members, especially Greeks and Armenians. This was also the impact of military conscription for young Muslim to enter military services resulted the lack of young generation of Muslim to hold many roles in public service and economic activities. In Erzurum in 1848 for instance, it was said that, "the Armenians have more hands, the Mussulman youth being taken for military service. The Mussulman do not hire labor and they are unable to cultivate the extent of land they posses" (Issawi in Braude and Lewis 1980, 276).[40] The Turks handicapped by conscription "fall into the hands of some Christian usurious banker (Armenian, Greek, or occasionally European) to whom the whole property or estate is soon sacrificed."

Data on the number of minority members who appointed as government officers before the 1856 were very limited and even there were recorded data on it, the accuracy of them was still in question. The only data recorded in the official document were provided by Karpat and reformulated by Findley. In 1844 for instance, in the Foreign Office there were 100 officers work in the government offices. 74 of them were Muslim and other 26 were non-Muslim. They were 11 Armenians, 11 European origins, 4 Greeks and no Jews at all.[41] The composition of administration in the office showed the dominance of Armenians after the Greece uprising and lost of trust toward the Greeks in Ottoman. Meanwhile, the Jews still could not regain their Golden Era after their decline in the mid of 17th century. Data after the decree of *Hatt-i Humayun* were more

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[39] Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire...*, 275.

[40] Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire...*, 276.

[41] Carter V. Findley, "The Administrative Legacy and Modern Middle East"..., 103.

available to describe the impact of the decree in the Ottoman bureaucracy. The decree itself was revolutionary in term of changing the policy toward minorities. After the decree, ethnic-religious background was diminished and replaced by equal opportunity for all of the people to enter public services. Merit system was implemented as well to switch previous personal and loyalty bases of bureaucracy.

In some aspects, those three minority groups, which called *millet-il erbaa* with Turks in line with the reformation, had ability to maintain sources in the Ottoman state, namely social and economy. In different level and time, the Greeks, the Armenian, and the Jews had prominent skills in European languages and other specific skills, which were needed by state and urban life. In economy, they played significant role in international trading, finance and custom. Their roles in some extent were even better than the Muslim majority. Unfortunately, in the state formation of Ottoman, their social and economic strengths did not give preferentiality to the "social and economic orientation." They preferred to exercise value oriented power relation and authority in the palace or the Sublime Porte because it would give them access to material wealth.[42] Thus, even they had such of significant resources in the society, they could not participate in the decision making process because they were still regarded as society who were categorized as the ruled (*reaya*).

Conclusion

Until the time of the decree of *Hatt-i Humayyun*, the government's arrangement toward minority groups was based on mixed factors of personality and usefulness of the minorities which is paralled with patrimonial bureaucratic character. Three prominent minority groups in *millet-*

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[42] Ergun Ozbudun, "The Ottoman Legacy and the Middle East State Tradition", in Carl L. Brown, *The Imperial Legacy*, New York: Colombia University Press, 1996, 133-154.

ilerbaa of the Ottoman Empire were Greeks, Armenians, and Jews besides the Turks and other Muslims as one group and each community had their own golden era during the Ottoman reign. The Jews played significant role in the economy and foreign relation because of their skills in finance and trade as well as language. Those skills brought them to privileged position in many sectors. In bureaucracy, their position fundamentally relied on confidence of the Sultans or other governors to use their skill in negotiation with foreign countries or domestic intrigues. Foreign Office and Custom Office were the government offices that used their skills to deal with international relation and trade. The Jews lost their position after economic decline and lost of confidence from the Sultans who were influenced by other high rank officers. In economy, their position was replaced by the Greeks and Armenians as well as in governmental posts. The case of Jews'declining role also happened to the Greeks and Armenians in different period when the government employed them in the government offices because of their ability in specific skills.

Before the decree of reformation in 1839 and 1856, they must rely on their skills to obtain position combining with patronage network within the government. It was actually a weak bases for them to stay in the positions and vulnerable for political, economic and patronage changes. For example, the Jews had faced severe arrangements because of losing confidence of the Sultans and political intrigues in the palace. The Greeks also lost their positions because of political upheaval in 1821 to 1823 in Greece that made the authorities replaced them with the Armenians. The case of Foreign Office in 1840 showed that the position of the Armenians was significant compare to the Greeks and the Jews after both were losing the favor of Ottomans' rulers.

The character of bureaucracy of the Ottoman was one of the major significant factors in making minorities did not have guarantee on their

position and put them in difficult situations in dealing with the authorities. Merit system and equal right in the government were alien in the government before the decree of *Hatt-i Humayun*. Thus, their economic resources and skills could not guarantee the availability of access to power because of the absent of middle class based on economic activities in the state of Ottoman Empire that could pressure the government. The case of David Passi is obvious in that case. However, the rise of consciousness to use legal bases to run bureaucracy and the government as a whole was not completely absent. It may explain why some Greeks and Jews, and Armenians in some cases, could hold good position in the government that needed their skill in the patrimonial web of bureaucracy.

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