

Disciplining Disobedient Subjects:
The Punishment of Aleppo's Insurgents in 1850 as a Contentious Issue*

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Introduction

In November 1850, Ottoman troops crushed a revolt by a part of Aleppo's population that had risen up three weeks earlier against conscription and attacked quarters inhabited mostly by Christians. The Ottoman reprisals were cruel. The Eastern suburbs were bombarded, burned, and looted; hundreds of its inhabitants were killed. The atrocities committed by the soldiers are described in the anonymous account *Ḥawādith mā tawaqq'a min al-ghawāyil bi-maḥrūsāt Ḥalab*:

Everyone [i.e., each of the *nizamiye* soldiers] who brought a head to his Excellency the *vali* was ordered to be given four *mamdūḥī* apiece. The soldiers were willing and started to cut and carry off heads. But those who brought a whole person received less. It really was an atrocious thing [to behold].¹

While the 1850 uprising itself can meanwhile be considered a relatively well-known chapter of Aleppo's history,² a thorough engagement with the competing interpretations of

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¹ Anonymous, *Ḥawādith mā tawaqq'a min al-ghawāyil bi-maḥrūsāt Ḥalab al-shahīra fī l-yawm al-sādis 'ashar min shahr tishrīn awwal gharbī sanat 1850*, ed. in Feras Krimsti, *Die Unruhen von 1850 in Aleppo: Gewalt im urbanen Raum* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2014), 399 (German translation, 422–23).

² Studies on the 1850 uprising include Krimsti, *Die Unruhen*; idem, "The 1850 Uprising in Aleppo: Reconsidering the Explanatory Power of Sectarian Argumentations", in *Urban Violence in the Middle East: Changing Cityscapes in the Transition from Empire to Nation State*, ed. by Ulrike Freitag et al. (New York: Berhahn, 2015), 141–63; Bruce Masters, "Aleppo's Janissaries: Crime Syndicate or *Vox Populi*?", in *Popular Protest and Political Participation in the Ottoman Empire: Studies in Honor of Suraiya Faroqhi*, ed. by Eleni Gara et al. (Istanbul: Bilgi University, 2011), 167–175, idem, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Sectarianism* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 158–161, idem, "The 1850 Events in Aleppo: An Aftershock of Syria's Incorporation into the Capitalist World System", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22 (1990), 3–20, Hidemitsu Kuroki, "The 1850 Aleppo Disturbance Reconsidered", in coll., *Acta Viennensia Ottomanica. Akten des 13. CIEPO-Symposiums vom 21. bis 25. September 1998 in*

the events in response to overlapping and intersecting local, imperial, and international frames of reference has yet to take place. This is partially due to the fact that the vast majority of eyewitness reports and documentary sources can be characterized as linear chronological retellings by Christian locals or representatives of the Ottoman authorities in the city. Given this situation, it is rather unproblematic to establish the sequence of events: After Ottoman the authorities, following orders from Istanbul, had proceeded to implement a military conscription, hundreds of the city's inhabitants from the Eastern quarters – notably Qārliq, Bāb al-Nayrab and Bānqūsā – rioted. The insurrection quickly escalated, the *vali* Mustafa Zarif Paşa having withdrawn to the relative safety of the fortress al-Shaykh Yabraq, outside the city. The insurgents launched attacks on churches, and private homes and shops owned by Christians were looted and burned down, notably in the quarter al-Ṣalība. Christian inhabitants were attacked and injured, and around twenty individuals killed. The *vali* resorted to delaying tactics, pretending to agree to the demands formulated by the rebels upon the intervention of the *mütesellim* (lieutenant governor) ‘Abdallāh Bābinsī. When, however, reinforcements arrived, he arrested ‘Abdallāh Bābinsī and the ring-leaders, and his troops besieged the suburbs, ultimately inflicting a terrible defeat on the insurgents.

Aleppo's inhabitants and authorities would grapple with this chapter in the city's history for years: the victims needed to be compensated for the losses incurred and those implicated had to be punished appropriately. Curiously, the punishment of the rebels has received scarcely any attention. It can roughly be divided into two consecutive phases: the Ottoman reprisals during the final phase of the uprising, an artillery bombardment and fighting in the streets, during which hundreds died, and, after the uprising, the punishment of those who were arrested. According to Ottoman estimates, 3.400 rebels were killed and 230 were arrested.³ However, the numbers vary greatly between different sources. The

Wien (Vienna: Institut für Orientalistik, 1999), 221–233; Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840-1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 101–107.

³ Cf. Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 161, and idem, "Aleppo's Janissaries", 171. Cf. the statistics of the anonymous Christian eyewitness quoted above: Anonymous, *Ḥawāḍith mā tawaqq'a min al-ghawāyil bi-maḥrūsāt Ḥalab al-shahīra fī l-yawm al-sādis 'ashar min shahr tishrīn awwal gharbī sanat 1850*, ed. in Krimsti, *Die Unruhen*, 399 (German translation, 424).

English Consul Nathaniel William Werry (1782–1855) states that 600 rioters were eventually arrested; of these, 400 were drafted into the army and 200 exiled.⁴

Aleppo had long been an important commercial and religious hub in the Levant. It therefore comes as no surprise that the 1850 uprising not only made an impact on the local sphere. Scholars mostly agree that imperial politics, notably the implementation of the Tanzimat reforms in the provinces, triggered the violent episode in Aleppo's urban history. Inversely, the 1850 uprising affected imperial and international political discourse, notably by factoring into the emerging phenomenon of sectarianism.⁵ Even Aleppo's locals were keenly aware of the world-wide repercussions of the events. The Christian author of another anonymous report, written some time before January 1851, offers the following observations:

In all honesty, it has to be said that many hundreds of Aleppo's Muslims refused to join the ranks of the disobedient insurgents (*al-ʿuṣāh*). While they unanimously agreed that they would not allow some of their own to be recruited, they would not bear weapons like the disobedient insurgents. More than that, some of them even took some Christians into their houses and protected them from being murdered. [...] They lamented these abominable deeds and acknowledged that *the reputation of Islam in the entire world was ruined completely* [italics mine].⁶

The anonymous author felt that the events had had an impact on the international stage. The present article examines the reverberations of the 1850 uprising in the international press, but above all the ways in which locals perceived of the punishment of the rebels, both in relation to an Ottoman discourse of order and discipline that directed the authorities' actions as well as in relation to European public opinion. How did locals from

⁴ Cf. Masters, "Aleppo's Janissaries", 173.

⁵ Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 134–41, starts his chapter on intercommunal dissonance in the nineteenth century with a discussion of the Tanzimat program. For Maʿoz, *Ottoman Reform*, 101, too, Aleppo's political history in the mid-nineteenth century represents "the process of transformation which the Tanzimat gave rise to in the Syrian town". However, for him what occurred was effectively an "outburst of Muslim fanaticism" (ibid., 105). Masters, "The 1850 Events", 12, takes issue with this essentialist approach, as do I. Cf. my own analysis of the role of the Tanzimat program in the 1850 uprising in *Die Unruhen*, 213–319.

⁶ Library of the Maronite Diocese, Aleppo, Section "Manuscripts", Ms. 1359, untitled report on folios 1a–4a, here 2a. Cf. for the same report Egyptian National Library, Cairo, Ms. Tārīkh Taymūr 2041 (=Naʿūm Mikhāʾil Ṣaqqāl, *Kitāb Majmaʿ al-azhār min al-ḥadīqat al-muʿtār*; shelved as: *Ḥawāḍith Ḥalab wa-Dimashq*), untitled report on folios 123a–125b, here 124a.

Aleppo engage with the problem of the punishment of the rebels and the violence meted out by the authorities against a group of Aleppo's inhabitants, in response to their attack on the city's Christians? Why did this prove to be such a contentious issue? I shall argue that local responses to the treatment of the rebels can be better understood if imperial and even global frames are taken into consideration; the response to the punishment of the Muslim inhabitants and rebels has to be understood as an expression of the ambiguities and inner contradictions with which the project of creating and upholding order was beset during the era of the Tanzimat.

The ensuing analysis will be based on journal articles from Europe devoted to the 1850 uprising and a local response to one of these articles in particular. An unnamed Christian local, who took issue with an article by Auguste de Toulgoët (1816–1879) about the uprising and the Ottomans' punitive measures that was published on 12 February 1851 in the French journal *La Presse*, set out to critically examine and deconstruct the arguments of the French journalist. This text has survived in manuscript form – unfortunately incomplete.⁷ It is entitled *al-Burhān al-kāfī fī iqnā' al-shāfī* ("Sufficient proof for ample conviction") and dated 25 March 1851, little more than one month after the publication of the French newspaper article. The author of the refutation is only identified by three letters, *ḥā', shīn, nūn* – probably an abbreviation for his name. Besides this unique analysis, ideas articulated by locals on the same issues in reports, diaries, and letters will be taken into consideration to elucidate the conceptual background of his argumentation.

Reverberations of the 1850 uprising in Aleppo in the international press

News of the 1850 uprising reached the European news press quickly, mostly through trade networks. *The Times*, for example, published W. Burkhardt Barker's translation of an Arabic letter by a Christian merchant from Aleppo whom he identifies as "Hanna Houri".⁸ Several

⁷ Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Damascus, Section "Manuscripts" (*makhṭūṭāt*), Ms. 325.

⁸ Burkhardt Barker, "The Massacre of Christians at Aleppo", *The Times*, 26 November 1850.

letters from a correspondent in Aleppo only signed with the letter “C.” were brought to the attention of a European public under the heading “The Massacre at Aleppo”.⁹ C.’s analysis of the causes for the uprising in the *The Times* issue of 22 November 1850 is strongly essentializing. It opens with the assertion that “[a] fanatical Moslem spirit has burst into fury on the Christian population of this town – such a horrible and altogether unprovoked persecution”. However, besides fanaticism, C. does also adduce the recruitment measures of the Ottoman authorities and Aleppo’s factional politics as causes for the uprising. Interestingly, he accuses the “Turkish soldiery” of doing nothing to prevent the uprising and to protect the city’s Christian inhabitants. C. accuses the Ottoman authorities of being incapable of punishing the insurgents:

While it is perfectly legitimate in a Government to levy troops, it ought to be in a position [...] to meet with sufficient force the consequences of such a measure. It ought to be prepared to crush every attempt at resistance. It was not so with our governing powers.

Since the article was written, while the insurgence was not yet quelled, the author adds:

Military relief is anxiously expected with the view to establish the Sultan’s authority. It remains to be seen whether this will be done effectually. If it be not, a deathblow to public confidence will have been struck. The ginus [sic!] of evils will stalk forth at any time to work like calamities. Much is expected from the sufferers from the interest which foreign Powers will take in this matter. It will be greatly deplored if England and France do not, on grounds of high and sound policy, promptly step forward solemnly to protest against such atrociously inhuman proceedings. Humanity loudly demands that the weak and unoffending should be protected and the guilty be punished.

An equitable punishment of the insurgents here becomes the measure of the Porte’s capacity to reaffirm its authority; foreign “humanitarian” intervention looms at the horizon in case of failure.

However, diverging views were expressed in newspaper articles as well. A slightly later anonymous article in *The Times*, which appeared on 21 February 1851, challenges the construal of the Aleppo uprising as a persecution of innocent Christians by fanatical

⁹ [C.] Anonymous, “The Massacre at Aleppo”, *The Times*, 22 November 1850, idem, “The Massacre at Aleppo”, *The Times*, 4 December 1850, and idem, “The Massacre at Aleppo”, *The Times*, 5 December 1850.

Muslims, as an “Oriental St. Bartholomew”:¹⁰

The most absurd versions of the deplorable events of which this city was lately the scene have already appeared in some of the European newspapers. It is, unfortunately, but too true that blood was shed and houses pillaged, and it is also true that the Christians were the victims in the outbreak and the Mussulmans the aggressors; but, instead of being a kind of Oriental St. Bartholomew, as many people in Europe seem to think, not more than five Christians were killed and six wounded in the fray.

With his clear-sighted assessment of the situation, the anonymous author of these lines cuts through the prevalent sectarian discourse of his times, denouncing the intentions of the European powers and the role of the Oriental Christians in securing European protection. Notably where the punishment of the insurgents is concerned, he takes a radical – and rather exceptional – stance:

The insurgent Mussulmans did not escape unpunished, for the troops called together to repress the outbreak acted against them with the greatest vigour. 600 of the insurgents fell by the hands of the soldiers, and the quarter of the city in which they lived, and where they had taken refuge, was completely destroyed by the cannonade. Of those of the insurgents who survived the fray, 300 of the chiefs have been condemned to the galleys, and 150 of their companions will very possibly meet the same fate as soon as their trial shall have taken place. Moreover, all those found guilty in a minor degree of having taken part in the insurrection have been embodied as soldiers [...].

Mehmed Kibrışlı Paşa, according to the journalist, “sees no difference between the Giaour [i.e. Christian infidel] and the follower of the Prophet.” With this assessment, the author of the article stresses Mehmed’s equal treatment of Christians and Muslims.

Other organs of the press quoted abundantly from the reports published in *The Times*, for example *The Leader*¹¹ in England or the *North American and United States Gazette* across the Atlantic.¹² Clearly, most of the newspaper articles were strongly influenced by the emerging language of sectarianism. The Porte was criticized for doing nothing; calls for a strict punishment of the rebels were reiterated.

¹⁰ Anonymous, “Massacre of Christians at Aleppo”, *The Times*, 21 February 1851.

¹¹ Anonymous, “Massacre at Aleppo”, *The Leader*, 23 November 1850, and anonymous, “The Disturbances at Aleppo”, *The Leader*, 7 December 1850.

¹² Anonymous, “The Massacre at Aleppo”, *North American and United States Gazette*, 11 December 1850.

The response of a local: al-Burhān al-kāfī fī iqnāʿ al-shāfī

An awareness of the European press on the part of the Ottoman government certainly existed at this point. As Roderic Davison has shown, the newspaper press was a new institution in the Ottoman Empire to which the Porte adjusted in a complex process that spanned the nineteenth century and involved several stages: from attempts to glean information from European newspapers, over the creation of French language journals in the Ottoman Empire, to the subsidizing of private newspapers, the influencing of European newspapers through payments, the planting of stories in these newspapers, and finally the licensing, censorship, or even suspension of newspapers.¹³ The accommodation of the newspaper went hand in hand with an increasing concern with public opinion during the nineteenth century.

While the Porte was well aware of the reporting on the 1850 uprising in Aleppo in European newspapers,¹⁴ much less is known about the reception of such news by locals in Aleppo. However, in the case of the 1850 uprising, a local reaction to an article by Auguste de Toulgoët in the French journal *La Presse* which appeared on 12 February 1851 allows for assessing this reception. Its author regrets the absence of a newspaper in which he could publish his opinion and states that he therefore opted to write a refutation (or “tractate”, *nubdha*). This manuscript is an exceptional text. Few contemporaries go beyond a purely descriptive recounting of the 1850 uprising. While most of the existing reports emphasize sequences of action and privilege linear narratives of “events”, the author of the refutation directly engages with questions such as: who were the victims, who the wrongdoers, which punishment was justified for whom, and finally what role did the

¹³ See in detail Roderic Davison, “How the Ottoman Government Adjusted to a New Institution: The Newspaper Press”, in idem, *Nineteenth Century Ottoman Diplomacy and Reforms* (Istanbul: Gorgias Press, 1999), 361–370.

¹⁴ Cf. Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 160. He refers to a folder with clippings and translations of newspaper articles about the 1850 uprising forwarded to the Porte. See Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Istanbul, İrade Hariciye (İ.H.) [73/]3526. The folder contains two articles published in the *Standard* and the *Times*, as well as summary translations in French.

Ottoman state and foreign – in particular French – powers play?

The text starts with an Arabic translation of the French article by de Toulgoët, the author of a royalist political pamphlet.¹⁵ The Arabic rendering of the French – which is fairly adequate – will be quoted here in full in English translation, as it is the backbone for the ensuing argumentation:¹⁶

Reproduction of the report which can be found in the gazette printed in Paris, the journal *La Presse*, which has to be answered. [This answer is provided] on 25 March of the Julian calendar, 1851. *Ḥāʾ, shīn, nūn*.

Now, we still have to talk about Aleppo. The official report sent from the government of Aleppo to the Sublime Porte indicates clearly the approved numbers – only five persons have died. Six persons were wounded and only one woman was abducted, none else. This is terrible, in any case. But if we reflect on it rationally, given that the former *vali* of Aleppo humiliated and despised ‘Abdullāh Bey Bābinsī, although [he] was so distinguished and influential that he was able to start the movement by pushing the popular mob and the Arabs of the waste land [i.e. the Bedouins], who are like beasts, to rise up, [given all this,] it is astonishing that during this movement no greater catastrophes happened than what actually occurred.

Now let us expose the punishment which was accorded: During the first battle, six hundred rebels were killed and three hundred were exiled. The man who abducted [the woman] was convicted and received a life sentence of forced labour. Five hundred others were recruited and sent to Crete as soldiers. In this way, the Ottoman state did what it was obliged to do. Given that the sultan’s softness is well known, one has to say, the punishment would probably have been less strict if the persons aggressed had not been Christians and the culprits had not been Muslims. But the masters of Bab-ı Hümayun want at all costs to level out differences between the religions.

The new *vali* of Aleppo, Mehmed [Kıbrıslı] Paşa, who had been consul in London for two years, now hurries and makes an effort to repair the damage and to prevent such movements from now on. Thanks to his efforts and ambitions, most of the stolen possessions were restored to their owners. And the little which was left that could not yet be restored was promised to be restored to their owners.

I have to highlight now something astonishing: some of Aleppo’s consuls, and the French consul at their head, defy the government’s actions in Aleppo – and this with their efforts to protect the plunderers from the justice of the city’s government. During the uprising, ‘Abdullāh Bey and some other heads of the insurgents in truth prevented the consuls from being robbed although [the insurgents] plundered other

¹⁵ See Auguste de Toulgoët, *Petit pamphlet politique à propos des décrets du 22 janvier 1852* (Paris: n.p., 1852).

¹⁶ The French original text is easily accessible. See Auguste de Toulgoët, “Nouvelles de l’Étranger: Turquie”, *La Presse*, 12 February 1851.

places. For this reason, the Ottoman government could not acquit them of their misdeeds, only because they did not rob all the people. Instead, the government has to take action and punish. The French consul importunes and tires the government, thus losing his reputation and influence, because, following his entourage's counsel, he prevents the plunderers from receiving their just punishment. In Paris, they should notice the fatal influence of their country in the Levant (*bilād al-sharq*), when their representatives mix with the business of the city's government.

Recently, we saw an example in Islāmbūl: Following an order issued in Paris, the French protection was withdrawn from an honourable man, well known by everyone, whose mistake it was to mess with Moscow's embassy. On the other hand, the French consul in Aleppo makes every effort to protect the biggest murderers.

How can the honour and nobility of the French state last in the Levant? How can the charitable donations be accepted which have been collected in Paris to repair the damage caused by persons the French flag protects and defends in Aleppo?

[The translation] was compared word by word to the original.¹⁷

The refutation consists of three parts: The translation of de Toulgoët's article into Arabic is followed by an "introduction" (*muqaddima*). This introduction gives the author's reasons for writing the treatise. He mentions that he has received the *La Presse* article on the uprising in Aleppo and wants to refute it.

The main text consists of five "items" (*bunūd*, sg. *band*). Argument by argument, the polemicist refutes the journalist's ideas. He accuses the journalist of being unprofessional and demonstrates that he must have had an informant with bad intentions for the relations between the Christians and Muslims of Aleppo (he therefore calls him "the biased informant", *ṣāhib al-gharaḍ*). Particularly two of the French journalist's points are discussed and rejected – on the one hand, his negative views on the role that Edmond de Lesseps, consul of Aleppo, played during the uprising, and, on the other hand, the excessive punishment of the rebels. The present contribution shall focus on the latter problem.

How does the Christian author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* engage with the French journalist's opinions regarding the treatment and punishment of the rebels – or rather with the views of some biased "informant" whose opinions (so he thinks) are at the basis of the journalist's article?

The Christians revel in the good which the informant lavishes on them, but they do not want to bear these bounties, because they weigh them down heavily. They have never been meant for them. If we want to understand and ask what the reason for six

¹⁷ Ms. 325, fol. 1b–2b.

hundred dead from among the rebels of Aleppo is (according to the official report of the biased informant), than the true and correct answer is that the reason for killing them was their disobedience towards the *salṭana*. They rose against the wish of the just king and they fought against the sultan's soldiers etc. Therefore, they were not killed for attacking the Christians, as the biased informant pretends. What is the reason for exiling three hundred villains from Aleppo (according to the approved numbers)? The reason for exiling them was that they were arrested fighting against the *mansure* soldiers.¹⁸

The French journalist argues that the Christians have been "favoured" by the sultan, considering the huge number of fatalities among the Muslim insurgents. Surprisingly, the anonymous polemicist does not counter this claim by employing the emerging sectarian rhetoric. He does not insist that the Christians were the victims of the Muslims. Instead, he departs from the Muslim-Christian conflict view altogether. The rebels, he contends, were to be punished for their "disobedience towards the *salṭana*", the sultan and the Ottoman state.

The author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* departs from the general assumption that the punishment meted out to the rebels was just. If it was just, setting against each other the numbers of those killed among the Christian inhabitants and the Muslim insurgents, as does de Toulgoët, is not legitimate:

[The biased informant's] lavishing bounties on the Christians is against all laws (*diḡḡa jamī' al-sharāya*) because if the number of the Christians slain was five (according to the approved numbers), how could six hundred Muslims have been slain in exchange? According to what we found out about the murderers and what has hitherto been approved, the killer of *khawāja* Na'ūm Ḥumsī, the Christian merchants' leader in Aleppo, until now was not punished in any way.¹⁹

The anonymous author proceeds to a few paradoxical calculations of how much value is assigned to a Christian or a Muslim human life:

How can the biased informant now lavish these bounties on the Christians? How can he assign to the blood of only five Christian persons (according to the approved numbers) the blood of six hundred Muslims? In accordance with this calculation, the blood of five Christians can be priced with the blood of one hundred and twenty Muslims [each]. If this were true, the Muslims of Aleppo would have burnt to ashes the bones of everyone born Christian in this city. [...] From what has been said until

¹⁸ Ibid., fol. 15b.

¹⁹ Ibid., fol. 16a.

now, can my dear reader doubt the sincerity of my words in the beginning of this part, namely that the biased informant wants to spread a great disorder between the Muslims and Christians of Aleppo (*fasādan aẓīman mā bayna islām wa-naṣārat Ḥalab*)?²⁰

Fasād (or, elsewhere, *ifsād*) implies a corrupting of the social order through culprits inciting the common folk “to abandon the ‘domain of obedience’”.²¹ The informant of the French journalist is thus identified as one of the “instigators of corruption and sedition” (*arbāb al-fasād*),²² a conspiratorial figure whose words had the power to corrupt the relations between gullible imperial subjects, and who therefore threatened to break the social order.

A revolt against the king

The author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* clearly states why the rebels were punished by the Ottoman troops: “the reason for killing them was their disobedience towards the *salṭana*”. In order to explain the fundamental disagreement between de Toulgoët and the anonymous author of the refutation, notions of order articulated in Ottoman works on statecraft as well as in routine correspondence, which had been integrated by the subjects over centuries, need to be revisited. Recent publications by Linda Darling and Maurus Reinkowski have shed light on the political idiom and rhetoric crystallizing around concepts of justice and order, as employed by Ottoman statesmen.²³

²⁰ Ibid., fol. 16b.

²¹ Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 45, refers to *ifsād* in the context of power politics on Mount Lebanon. Notables accused each other of *ifsād* and of inciting commoners to rebellion. Cf. also Maurus Reinkowski, “The State’s Security and the Subjects’ Prosperity: Notions of Order in Ottoman Bureaucratic Correspondence (19th Century)”, in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. by Hasan Karateke and M. Reinkowski (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 203, on the uses of the Ottoman Turkish term *fesad*.

²² Cf. Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 48–49.

²³ See in particular Linda Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2013); Reinkowski, “The State’s Security”; idem, “The Imperial Idea and *Realpolitik*: Reform Policy and Nationalism in the Ottoman

Images of cyclical order play an important role in this context. First among these is the so-called “Circle of Justice,” a popular concept with Ottoman political theorists:

[...] the first doctrine [i.e. the Circle of Justice] maintains that the survival of the state depends on the prosperity of the subjects, in particular the peasantry. They pay the taxes which enable the sultan to maintain the military and the bureaucratic apparatus. The prosperity of the subjects depends on the justice and it is the function of the sultan to render justice.²⁴

Obviously, in taking issue with the new tax, the insurgents in Aleppo targeted one of the core elements of the Circle of Justice. The author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* stresses yet another endangered element of the Circle of Justice: the rebels “rose against the wish of the just king and they fought against the sultan’s soldiers”, and “they were arrested fighting against the *mansure* soldiers”. The rebels’ actions endangered the military – in theory, the latter was supposed to help the sultan secure the prosperity of his subjects by upholding justice.

Reinkowski argues that a second cyclical concept of order can be identified in Ottoman bureaucratic correspondence, apart from the Circle of Justice:

The ideal order of security *cum* prosperity is always endangered by negative events and evildoers. By admonition and, in the last resort, by physical violence, order is to be restored. Culprits are chastened and the old equilibrium is regained.²⁵

According to this conception, security and prosperity are endangered, but the equilibrium is regained, only for this cyclical movement to start anew.

Ussama Makdisi has also pointed out how crucial the notion of non-linear time was in Ottoman political culture.²⁶ The Arabian periphery frequently witnessed “ritualized, episodic purifications of a corrupted public order” by the Ottoman state.²⁷ The fundamental idea expressed in *al-Burhān al-kāfī* is also that of an endangerment and restoration of order by the state. However, as will be shown below, the anonymous author struggles with the

Empire”, in *Comparing Empires: Encounters and Transfers in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Jörn Leonhard and Ulrike von Hirschhausen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 453–471.

²⁴ Dick Douwes, *The Ottomans in Syria: A History of Justice and Oppression* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 3. On the Circle of Justice cf. also Reinkowski, “The State’s Security”, 203–204.

²⁵ Reinkowski, “The State’s Security”, 204.

²⁶ Cf. Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 49–50.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

fact that the cyclicity of the process is disrupted.

But first the general idea of order upheld by the state, endangered through rebellion, and restored through the state needs to be examined more thoroughly. As Dick Douwes emphasizes, the Ottoman concept of the state was not an impersonal abstraction, but it was anchored in the dynastic rule of the sultan – “the just king,” as the anonymous author of the polemical treatise has it – and, by extension, of his ministers.²⁸ This king could, if his subjects were disobedient, annihilate them entirely, without it being excessive – “if he ordered the city of Aleppo to be razed to the ground, destroyed in its entirety, and killed everyone inside who breathes, could anyone keep him from doing so or dare to say that he (God may protect him) did more than what he should?”²⁹

The polemicist is not alone in insisting that the insurgents needed to be punished for their disobedience against the king. Local eyewitnesses to the 1850 events, particularly among the Christian inhabitants of Aleppo, tend to conceptualize the uprising as a moment of disobedience and insubordination against the legitimate ruler, less as a conflict between two groups, let alone religious groups, in the city.

For example, in a draft of a letter to the Propaganda Fide, Dīmītriyūs al-Anṭāqī calls the 1850 uprising “the revolt against the King” (*al-tamarrud ḍidda l-malik*).³⁰ In the same letter, he prays, “May the Lord, with your prayers, direct us and guide us to the good, may he make the sword of our merciful and caring King victorious [...].”³¹ This clearly shows that the disruption of order, as Dīmītriyūs al-Anṭāqī perceived it, opposed not two groups of inhabitants, but the ruler and one group of his subjects (the sultan vs. Aleppo’s disobedient inhabitants).

His contemporary Yūsuf Ḥātīm (d. 1876) is clearly of the same opinion. In November 1850, he writes to his brother Būlus Ḥātīm (1811–1885):

Let us ask God in tears to protect the life of our King Sultan Abdūlmecid *khān*, to

²⁸ Cf. Douwes, *The Ottomans in Syria*, 2.

²⁹ Ms. 325, fol. 14a.

³⁰ Dīmītriyūs al-Anṭāqī, letter to the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*, 25 December 1850, ed. in Krimsti, *Die Unruhen*, 458 (German translation, 463).

³¹ Ibid.

support his Empire, his ministers, his *müşirs*, his statesmen, his well-protected soldiers, as well as the Muslims of our city who protected us and did not break away from the Revered King, amen, amen, amen.³²

Again, two pivotal elements from the Circle of Justice are foregrounded: bureaucrats and soldiers. It is “King Sultan Abdülmecid *khān*” upon whom Yūsuf focuses his prayers; he upholds the Cycle of Justice the rebellion endangered.

According to the anonymous account *Ḥawādith mā tawaqq‘a min al-ghawāyil bi-maḥrūsāt Ḥalab*, a denial of the ruler by some of Aleppo’s inhabitants is at the heart of the 1850 uprising:

Some of the ignorant inhabitants claimed that our Sultan Abdülmecid *khān* – may the Merciful support him – is the sultan of the Turks and not the sultan of the Arabs and that their king should be one from among the Arabs.³³

What looks at first glimpse like an articulation of Arab nationalism *avant la lettre* or Bedouin self-assertion can be understood as yet another figuration of the idea of the disruption of order, caused by a rebellion of some subjects against their legitimate ruler, out of ignorance.³⁴ The author accordingly depicts the outcome of the uprising as a “victory” of the sultan over his “enemies,” the disobedient subjects of Aleppo:

Our Lord, the Lord of good will, protected his creatures who had no refuge but in him, and he ordered that our Master his Excellency Abdülmecid *khān* be victorious. May the merciful support him, grant him glory and prosperity throughout his life, as long as the night is followed by the day, and as the earth turns. May he give a long life to him and to his eminent ministers, and may he make him victorious over his enemies [...].³⁵

The sultan’s victory in Aleppo is one in a circular movement of continued victories; this cyclicity is expressed through the striking metaphor of the succession of day and night. The day (which stands for good) follows the night (which stands for the evil) in a

³² Yūsuf Ḥātīm, letter to Būlus Ḥātīm, 9 November 1850, ed. in Krimsti, *Die Unruhen*, 468 (German translation, 471–472).

³³ Anon., *Ḥawādith mā tawaqq‘a min al-ghawāyil bi-maḥrūsāt Ḥalab*, ed. in Krimsti, *Die Unruhen*, 396–397 (German translation, 418).

³⁴ On the idea that commoner rebellion originated in ignorance, see, with regard to Mount Lebanon, Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism*, 47.

³⁵ Anon., *Ḥawādith mā tawaqq‘a*, ed. in Krimsti, *Die Unruhen*, 399 (German translation, 423).

continuous movement.

Rather unsurprisingly, another anonymous, and untitled, report conceptualizes the uprising as a moment of insubordination against the ruler as well. It narrates how, on 20 October 1850, while the city was still in upheaval, the insurgents – now afraid of their own deeds – decided to ask the Porte for mercy.³⁶ The perspective of the petitioners can be reconstructed, too. Those implicated in the events asked the sultan for forgiveness, emphasizing that their actions were not to be understood as insubordination. This petition has survived in the imperial archives.³⁷ The rebelling subjects explained their actions with the offensive behavior of the Christians and stressed the catastrophic impact of the recruitment plans. The abolition of conscription, so they argued, would not infringe on the sultan's reform program. God was all-powerful and the sultan shared in his omnipotence, so he would be able to forgive.

A second petition, written in December, shortly after the uprising had been quelled, is no less strong a plea for forgiveness. However, now the authors went back on the wording of the earlier petition, which, they claimed, was written under duress. The petition starts with laudatory poems on the sultan and identifies 'Abdallāh Bey Bābinsī as the instigator of the uprising, an episode of *fasād*. The eighty "obedient quarters" (*al-maḥallāt al-ṭāyī'īn*) who initiated this new petition claimed they would listen to and obey all imperial orders, regarding taxation, recruitment, and everything else.³⁸ Both petitions are strongly inscribed into a discourse about the subjects' obedience to the ruler.³⁹

The proceedings against the rebels in the aftermath of the 1850 uprising further prove that the events were perceived as foremost affecting the relation between the ruler and his disobedient subjects. As Bruce Masters has observed, despite the Ottomans' energetic efforts to restore stolen goods to the Christian victims, none of the insurgents was

³⁶ Anonymous, untitled report starting with *innahū fī 16 tishrīn al-awwal sanat 1850*, ed. in Krimsti, *Die Unruhen*, 435 (German translation, 447).

³⁷ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, İstanbul, İrade Dahiliye [İ.DH] 223/13268.

³⁸ İ.DH 226/13493.

³⁹ Cf. also Masters, "Aleppo's Janissaries", 168–69, on the rioters' petitions and pledge of loyalty to the sultan. Cf. already idem, *Christians and Jews*, 159.

ever punished as a thief.⁴⁰ The fact that proof of guilt remained elusive certainly played a role in this, but Ottoman official documents which list those who had dared to rebel,⁴¹ demonstrate that, at its most basic level, the 1850 uprising was perceived as a moment in which some of Aleppo's inhabitants lapsed into disobedience against their rightful king.

Disciplining disobedient subjects once and for all

It was the just ruler's right and duty to punish disobedient subjects for endangering the order – this idea was thoroughly theorized by Ottoman statesmen and obviously appropriated by Aleppo's inhabitants of all confessions. Why then did the author of *al-Burhān al-kāfi* devote so much room to the question of punishment? Why the preoccupation with its perceived excessiveness and atrocity? Why the detailed calculations and considerations of its appropriateness?

According to Reinkowski, the Tanzimat period (roughly, 1839–1876) saw a fundamental change in rhetoric which articulated itself in “a new notion of order which partially complements, partially supersedes the old one.”⁴² In the framework of the imperial reform program, a new disciplining discourse – evinced for example through the use of the words *terbiye* and *te'dib* – was introduced. The idea of a cyclical restoration of order morphed into what Reinkowski calls a “one-way concept.”⁴³ Instead of accepting the eternal cyclical movement from disorder to order to disorder etc., order was supposed to be restored once and for all. “The traditional stress on obedience, however”, Reinkowski contends, “is transformed into a quest for control and discipline as reformed variants of obedience”.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Cf. Masters, “Aleppo's Janissaries”, 171.

⁴¹ See for example İ.DH 225/13432 and 13483.

⁴² Reinkowski, “The State's Security”, 206.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 211.

In the framework of a discussion of the concomitant phenomenon Ussama Makdisi calls “Ottoman imperialism,” the latter has similarly observed that “Ottoman reformers sought to reshape, improve, and ultimately discipline the Arab peripheries”⁴⁵ and that “reform and state violence went hand in hand.”⁴⁶

Auguste de Toulgoët observes such a quest for control and discipline in Aleppo, when he writes that “the new *vali* of Aleppo, Mehmed [Kıbrıslı] Paşa [...] now hurries and makes an effort to repair the damage and to prevent such movements from now on.” The author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* is therefore obliged to delve deep into the question of the appropriateness of the punitive measures in his response, exactly for the reason that they appeared excessive.

Contemporaries expected the Ottomans’ response to Aleppo’s disobedient inhabitants, and negotiated it after it had been given. Europeans tended to underline the disciplinary dimension of this response. The journalist writing about the 1850 uprising for *The Times* sees a harsh military response as a precondition for the reaffirmation of the sultan’s authority. In a newspaper clipping that came to the attention of the Porte, the sultan’s victory is conceptualized as a triumph of civilization. We also read:

The Sultan, who always leans towards indulgent measures, has been compelled on this occasion to do violence to his feelings, and to show by severe repression that those who, through their fanaticism, wish, by organizing vast conspiracies, to intimidate him and make him abandon his principles of religious tolerance, will never succeed.⁴⁷

The Russian Count Carl Robert Nesselrode (1780-1862) in his correspondence also emphasizes that he expects the Porte to “punish, with an exemplary severity, the crimes staged in Aleppo and to prevent the repetition of similar excesses elsewhere.”⁴⁸ The English consul Werry calls the violent response by the Ottomans a “lesson” in obedience for the

⁴⁵ Ussama Makdisi, “Rethinking Ottoman Imperialism: Modernity, Violence and the Cultural Logic of Ottoman Reform”, in *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. by Jens Hanssen et al. (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), 30.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁷ BOA: İrade Hariciye [İ.H] 73/3526.

⁴⁸ İ.H 73/3524: “pour punir, avec une sévérité exemplaire, les crimes dont la ville d’Alep a été le théâtre [sic] et pour prévenir le renouvellement des mêmes excès dans d’autres lieux.”

Muslims in Northern Syria.⁴⁹

But not only foreigners and foreign residents in Aleppo reflected on the severity of the Ottoman measures. The quotation at the beginning of this contribution, a recollection by a Christian contemporary, shows that even the victims of the uprising were somewhat uncomfortable with the exceedingly violent reprisals by the authorities.

Contemporaries were well aware that these atrocities were committed in order to “discipline” the subjects. The Maronite Bishop Būlus Ārūtīn (1788-1851), for example, quotes from the speech given by Mehmet Kıbrıslı Paşa. Upon his arrival Mehmet announced:

When the High Porte – may God make it last eternally – heard about the disobedience (*al-‘aṣāwah*) in Aleppo, it sent me to deliver a strike to the city (*li-kaymā aḍrib balad*) and to make it obey (*uṭayya‘ahā*). However, although I saw that it was already over and everything had returned to its ordinary state, except for the disobedience that remains latent, hidden, and even if the appearance lasts, it is my obligation to fulfill the royal wish in four matters: First, [...]. Third, the disciplining (*ta’dīb*) of the disobedient rebels (*al-‘uṣāh*) responsible for this ignominious offense [...].⁵⁰

The Maronite Bishop clearly echoes the new concept of betterment through discipline, in the rhetoric of the new Ottoman *vali*.

Interestingly, İbrahim Reşid (1812–1892), the secretary for the council of state (*divan kitabeti*) who served Mustafa Zarif Paşa during the uprising, later started his report *Vaka-ı Haleb* (“The Aleppo Event”, written between 1860 and 1888) by insisting on the educational value of his account.⁵¹

Aleppo was by no means an exception in this regard. Rebels were also punished with extreme cruelty by Ottoman soldiers in Ma‘lūlā, where disturbances of a similar nature occurred in the same month as in Aleppo. The author of a letter, who can be identified as

⁴⁹ Foreign Office, London, 226/107 (“From Aleppo Mostly About the Insurrection”). Nathaniel William Werry, Letter to Rose, 8 November 150. The line is also quoted by Masters, “Aleppo’s Janissaries”, 171.

⁵⁰ Būlus Qar’alī, ed., *Ahamm ḥawādith Ḥalab fī niṣf al-awwal min al-qarn al-tāsi‘ ‘ashar* (Cairo: Al-Maṭba‘a al-Sūriya, 1927), 79–98 (edition of the account attributed to Būlus Ārūtīn), here 96.

⁵¹ The report has survived both together with İbrahim Reşid’s *divan* (Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, İstanbul: Ms. Tercüman 256, 37b–47a) and on its own (İstanbul Üniversitesi Merkez Kütüphanesi, İstanbul: Türkçe Yazmalar Bölümü, Ms. 9645).

the Russian consul in Beirut – probably Konstantin Mikhailovich Bazili (1809–1884), since the latter held the position of Russian consul in Beirut from 1839 to 1853 – is scandalized about what he considers “a useless carnage” (“un carnage inutile”):

According to new intelligence I have received about the second defeat of the Motouali rebels in the area of Maloula, it is obvious that the Ottoman troops and Moustapha Pacha, who commanded them, have completely lost sight of the true vocation of soldiers in popular uprisings and even of the clearest interests of their government. It is estimated that the number of victims of this attack amounts to 1.500 men. These men, seized while moving in procession and panicking, threw their weapons away and were slaughtered by nisams and bachibouzouks. This can be proven by the fact that not a single soldier was killed on the side of the government troops. It is obvious that all these men could have been arrested, and since it is conscription that has started the rebellion, what better way to quell it than the conscription of all these men who were led astray by the instigators of the troubles [...].⁵²

While the numbers are of course hopelessly inflated, these lines demonstrate an awareness of the unprecedented violence meted out by the Ottomans against insubordinate subjects that astonished contemporary observers.

Reinkowski has rightly insisted on the “disproportionate and erratic nature of change” of political concepts and idiom.⁵³ As mentioned above, the new rhetoric of order of the Tanzimat age was itself strongly rooted in traditional concepts and terminology. References to Muslim tradition and law (*shari‘a*) in the reform edicts, but also in the political discourse of the reformers, are an important example.⁵⁴ With this in mind, it is easier to understand why the author of the refutation introduces the extensive calculations

⁵² BOA: Hariciye Tercüme Odası [HR.TO] 285/62. Excerpt from a letter of the Russian Consul, Beirut, 1/13 November 1850: “D’après les nouveaux détails [sic] qui me parviennent sur la seconde défaite des rebelles Motoualis aux environs de Maloula, il est évident que les troupes Ottomanes et Moustapha Pacha qui les commandait ont complètement perdu de vue la vraie vocation du soldat dans les émeutes populaires et même les intérêts les plus clairs de leur Gouvernement. On porte à 1500 hommes le nombre des victimes de cet engagement. Ces hommes pris dans des défilés et saisis d’une panique générale, jetaient leurs armes et se laissaient égorger par les nisams et les bachibouzouks. La preuve en est qu’il n’y [ait] pas un soldat de tué du côté des troupes du Gouvernement. Il est évident que tous ces hommes auraient pu être faits prisonniers, et puisque c’est la conscription qui provoque la révolte, quelle meilleure répression que l’enrôlement de tous ces hommes égarés par les promoteurs des troubles [...]”

⁵³ Reinkowski, “The State’s Security”, 196.

⁵⁴ Cf. for example Roderic Davison, “Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century”, *American Historical Review* 59 (1954), 847, who comments on the “Muslim ring” of the Gülhane edict.

with which he attempts to convince his readers of the absurdity of de Toulgoët's claim (that the punishment was harder because the Christians were the victims) with the observation that this assessment is "against all laws" (*diḍḍa jamīʿ al-sharāya*).

The anonymous author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* appeals to well-established notions of order and justice. According to him, Aleppo's rebels were punished for their "disobedience towards the *salṭana*". At the same time, the polemicist's extensive discussion of the rebels' punishment sheds light on something unaccounted for, something that had to be explained – the extremely violent response by the Ottomans to the 1850 uprising. The authorities' punitive measures were obviously in harmony with the new disciplining discourse of the Tanzimat age. Taken out of context, however, they just seemed exceedingly brutal. It is this excessive brutality that prompts the author of the refutation to engage extensively with the question of the punishment.

Restoring equality through fair punishment

The author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* bases his entire argument regarding the punishment of the rebels on the idea of a disruption of order caused by the subjects' disobedience. To restore justice is to restore a balance or an equilibrium. However, as Reinkowski cautions, this concept of justice should not be misunderstood as a guarantee of equal rights to all.⁵⁵ And indeed, it is in navigating the concept of equality that the biggest difference between Auguste de Toulgoët and the author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* emerges.

Scholars almost stereotypically invoke the introduction of the concept of equality into the political discourse during the Tanzimat period. Roderic Davison's meanwhile classic study of attitudes toward Christian-Muslim equality in the nineteenth century comes to mind.⁵⁶ He argues that Christians were "second-class citizens" who were treated unequally in various ways until the nineteenth century, when equality became official

⁵⁵ Cf. Reinkowski, "The State's Security", 201.

⁵⁶ See Davison, "Turkish Attitudes".

policy.⁵⁷ Elsewhere, when discussing “the westernization of Ottoman diplomacy” in this era, Davison identifies equality as one of the major new principles adopted by Ottoman statesmen who attempted to restyle diplomacy in order to ward off attacks by other powers interfering in Ottoman domestic affairs.⁵⁸ However, the process was by no means as linear as this view suggests; it produced ambiguities and inner contradictions.

While Davison and others have stressed the continuity in the adoption of the principle of equality during the Tanzimat period, which culminated in the creation of *osmanlılık*, a new egalitarian concept of Ottoman citizenship,⁵⁹ recent scholarship tends to emphasize the uncertainties in this process.⁶⁰ Butrus Abu-Manneh, for example, points to the discontinuity between the contents and objectives of the two edicts that came to be understood as milestones of the Tanzimat period, the *Hatt-ı Şerif* of Gülhane (1839) and the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* (1856).⁶¹ The new emphasis on equality was not easily compatible with the existing conceptual framework:

Equality of all the subjects of a state who inhabit a defined territory is a political concept taken from the western concept of the state, the import of which is that all the inhabitants are equal members of the political community and enjoy equal rights and duties. However, this concept differed from the Islamic legal and political theory according to which the ethos of the state is justice not equality of all subjects. According to the *shari’a*, it is the duty of the ruler to apply justice for all his subjects of whatever creed or denomination they are. But Muslims only form the political community and equality applies among them and not between them and the non-Muslims.⁶²

⁵⁷ Ibid., 845–46.

⁵⁸ Cf. Roderic Davison, “The Westernization of Ottoman Diplomacy in the Nineteenth Century”, in *Nineteenth Century Ottoman Diplomacy and Reforms* (op. cit.), 321, and similarly idem, “Turkish Attitudes”, 850.

⁵⁹ See especially the discussion of the imperial edicts and reform politics in Davison, “Turkish Attitudes”, 847–854. However, Davison admits to the existence of “formidable obstacles” to equality encountered by statesmen, cf. *ibid.*, 849.

⁶⁰ See for example Heather Sharkey, *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 135–142; the chapter is entitled “Religious Equality and Liberty; Idealism and Realpolitik: The Ambiguities of the Ottoman Reform Edicts (1839 and 1859 [sic]).”

⁶¹ See Butrus Abu-Manneh, “Two Concepts of State in the Tanzimat Period: the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane and the Hatt-ı Hümayun”, *Turkish Historical Review* 6.2 (2015), 117–137.

⁶² Ibid., 134.

This is not the place to question or further substantiate the claim that the difference between the two imperial edicts resides in the extent of Western influence or to engage in a more profound way with the assumption that the concept of equality stems from European political thought. The decisive point is that equality plays an ambiguous role in the conception of order which is at the basis of the vigorous attempt by the polemicist from Aleppo to undermine de Toulgoët's argumentation. The refutation reflects the difficulties the discourse on equality posed during the crucial period before the concept of equality was more fully articulated in the 1856 decree. What is more, it does so in the voice of a local from the Arabian periphery of the Ottoman Empire, who was nevertheless well aware of Aleppo's place in the world.

The author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* insists that the rebels "were not killed for attacking the Christians". Justice could therefore not be restored by meting out a punishment to the rebels that was commensurate with the violence inflicted during the uprising on Aleppo's Christian inhabitants. Consequently, for the author of the refutation, the punishment *could not possibly* have been too vigorous. Equality played no role in this. Yet the polemicist brings it into play when he discusses de Toulgoët's claim that "the punishment would probably have been less strict if the persons aggressed had not been Christians and the culprits had not been Muslims". Such a preferred treatment of the Christians in punishment would tip the balance heavily in their favour. The author of *al-Burhān al-kāfī* calls this idea "lavishing bounties on the Christians" and opposes it vigorously. While the retaliatory measures of the Porte were meant to restore justice, not equality, the Porte was still a guardian of equality – when subjects needed to be punished, this punishment was consistent for all its subjects.

The idea that equality could be established and restored through punishment, to which the author of the refutation objects, emerges clearly in the correspondence of others who had appropriated Western egalitarian views. An account of the 1850 uprising in Aleppo by Antonius Ameuney (1821–1888) is a particularly interesting case in point.⁶³

⁶³ Antonius Ameuney, "The Late Disturbances at Aleppo", 16 November 1850, US National Archives, Record Group 84, Beirut consular, vol. 39 ("Official letters received 1833–52"), 386–89. I thank Peter Hill for kindly drawing my attention to this report and for sharing a digital copy with me.

Born in Syria, Ameuney studied at King's College in London and later became Professor of Arabic Language and Literature there. He was a member of the Syrian Literary and Scientific Association. In his report, he writes that "[t]he Moslems of Aleppo are perhaps the most bigotted [sic] in Syria." His sectarian rhetoric is interspersed with essentialisms such as "Islamism is unchangeable!" It is in this context that he brings the issue of equality up without bothering to differentiate between the general population and the Ottoman authorities:

To them the idea that all men are equal before the law is absurd – To think that a Christian or a Jew is to be placed on the same footing with a true believer is preposterous.

Questions revolving around the concept of equality then come up again after a lengthy chronological report of the events, when the triumph of the Ottoman troops over the insurgents and the punitive measures are discussed:

They then attacked the Moslems in their houses – burned three of the Moslem quarters – Pillaged, sacked & violated the females – The soldiers did more with the ~~Christians~~ Moslems than the Moslems did with the Christians – The Christians suffered more fear this time than they did when they were attacked before – Had the Moslems succeeded in defeating the soldiers they would it is believed have murdered the Xtian & the Europeans.

It is telling that a contemporary who has integrated the sectarian rhetoric of his age to such a degree comments disapprovingly on the punishment of the insurgents. This shows once again that contemporaries were shocked by the excessive violence with which the uprising was repressed – even the unlikeliest to be shocked on behalf of the Muslim insurgents, it seems. Of course Ameuney quite ably transforms the Porte's excessive punitive measures into a potential threat to the city's Christian community.

More importantly, however, Ameuney obviously evaluates the restoration of order by the authorities on the basis of a concept of justness heavily rooted in the notion of an equitable punishment. Like de Toulgoët, Ameuney opines that the Porte's punitive measures went too far, because what was done to the rebels should not exceed what was done to the Christians.

It is against this background that de Toulgoët's article with its emphasis on notions like equality and privilege, and the anonymous Christian's attack on his argumentation,

need to be understood. The author of the refutation opposes this notion of order based on keeping the subjects on an equal footing at all times, and instead points out that order is based on the upholding of relations between the ruler and his subjects. The ruler is forced to punish disobedient behaviour in order to act as a just ruler. Balancing the blood of five Christians against the blood of one hundred and twenty Muslims is *not* just in the polemicist's eyes, but punishing disobedient insurgents revolting against the ruler by killing and exiling the rebels in huge numbers *is* a measure of re-establishing justice. The refutation then exposes and navigates two conceptions of order in which equality plays a fundamentally different role. For de Toulgoët and Ameuney, it describes the relations between the sultan's subjects, for the anonymous author of the refutation, it describes the sultan's conduct toward his subjects.

Summary and conclusion

The punishment of the insurgents in 1850 emerges as a contentious issue in contemporary political discourse. It was addressed in European newspapers, by Christian eyewitnesses, as well as by the Ottoman authorities in the city; it was discussed and became the object of disagreement.

The majority of Western journalists demanded vigorous retaliation by the Porte, during and after the uprising; the authority of the latter was called into question and European powers were asked to intervene on behalf of the Oriental Christians. In a few cases, however, journalists took a critical view on the sectarian arguments to which their contemporaries resorted and inverted their sectarian logic. They recognized the unprecedented vigour with which the authorities punished the insurgents during the final phase and in the immediate aftermath of the events – especially *The Times* article published on 21 February 1851 and the *La Presse* article by Auguste de Toulgoët published on 12 February of the same year offered highly critical assessments of the situation. De Toulgoët in particular suggested that the punishment meted out was more severe than it would have been if Christians had attacked Muslims in Aleppo and not vice versa. It remains to be asked in future studies what domestic political motives may have shaped such views? Especially

de Toulgoët's acerbic criticism of the French consul in Aleppo will have to be taken into consideration in an attempt to better understand his motives.

De Toulgoët's article prompted an unknown local from Aleppo who learned about it to engage with the opinions and ideas expressed by the Frenchman in a refutation entitled *al-Burhān al-Kāfī*. As has been shown above, especially where the punishment of Aleppo's insurgents is concerned, the refutation can be understood as a resonance chamber. The views expressed in the polemical text can be better understood against overlapping and intersecting frames of reference – the local, the imperial, and even the international. Far too little is known about the reception of English and French newspaper articles in the Arabian provinces of the Ottoman Empire. How were they made available to locals? In which ways did locals respond to them? *Al-Burhān al-Kāfī* sheds some light on these questions.

In insisting that the punishment was necessary not because one group of Aleppo's inhabitants had risen against another, but because one group of Aleppo's inhabitants had risen against their ruler, the anonymous author appeals to concepts of order theorized by Ottoman statesmen and firmly integrated by Aleppo's population, both Christians and Muslims. As shown above, numerous similar statements from locals testify to this.

Yet, although the author of the refutation declared that the sultan had the right to punish the insurgents as severely as he wanted, a detailed engagement with the commensurability of the punishment follows. It indicates that something was off that had to be explained and accommodated: a new disciplining mission and rhetoric advanced by the Ottomans, also in response to international pressure – pressure that crystallized, for example, in the Western journalistic articulations considered above. A wide range of documents confirm this new disciplining discourse that was a by-product of the Tanzimat: Western diplomats in the Levant show themselves surprised at the display of violence in Aleppo and elsewhere in the same year, and locals from Aleppo remember the declarations of the authorities to this effect.

In one respect in particular, *al-Burhān al-kāfī* takes up an aspect of the debate about political order that was negotiated between the Porte and European diplomats in the era of the Tanzimat: the problem of equality. The vagaries, ambiguities, and insecurities in the process of its integration into political discourse and its implementation emerge from the polemical treatise. Its author is firm in insisting that the punishment of the insurgents was

not meant to elevate Christians and Muslims to an equal standing, but to restore order and justness. However, while equality between the sultan's subjects could not be obtained through a punishment adequate to the offense committed, the punishment of the insurgents was also not creating inequality by unjustly tipping the balance in favour of the Christians. Equality was an integral aspect of the sultan's conduct towards all his subjects, at all times.