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Regional Fracture and Its Intractability in World Politics: The Case of the Late Ottoman Empire

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Abstract

Scholars have long grappled with the puzzle as to why some regions become peaceful and resilient while others crumble into perpetual insecurity. Much of the scholarship that they produced viewed regional formations as extensions of the state system. This work argues that state-centric tools to study regionalism have precluded us from uncovering regional forms of engagement under hierarchical relations of empires. They have privileged great power politics, at the expense of the political agency of non-state actors, such as minority communities, constitutional assemblies, and political parties, among others. This work highlights the lack of conceptual tools to capture historical continuity in the regional fabric of world politics. The bulk of the article engages in the methodology of concept development for regional fracture, in an effort to advance comparative regional studies historically and systematically. The concept development is then applied in the context of the Eastern Anatolian region of the late Ottoman Empire.

Introduction

Theories of International Relations (IR) and comparative politics have long grappled with the puzzle as to why some regions become peaceful and resilient while others crumble into perpetual insecurity (Buzan and Wæver 2003; Katzenstein 2005; Lemke 2002). How is it that South American states succeeded in excising armed political conflict from their region, while many parts of Africa continue to struggle with it as an intractable problem (Francis 2017)? What are the chances of postcommunist states in Russia's backyard, in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, or Central Asia, to form meaningful regional groupings? When established, can such regional groupings engender development? Can they infuse the member states with agency with which to bargain with great powers, near and far? And in policy terms, reckoning with functional regional connectivity is self-evident during this era of the COVID-19 pandemic. The regional fabric of world politics is critical to understand as states try to balance between global efficiency and local resiliency, and as the rapidly de-globalizing world is pushing it dangerously close to narrow, state-level parochialism and closure.

Formalized in the post-World War II period, Regional Studies (Katzenstein 2002) recognized regions as socially constructed and reinforced in daily practice. And in the post-Cold War period of thaw in bipolarity in world politics, the regional level of political life has regained its scholarly luster from the 1970s: regions become recognized for their autonomy relative to great powers of the day (Buzan and Wæver 2003). Largely interdisciplinary in nature, definitions of regions and their boundary delimitations have accentuated their various attributes over time. Some of the definitional debates engaged the centrality of territory versus functionality (Alagappa 1995; Väyrynen 2003).

Others debated the centrality of states versus non-state actors in making and constructing political and economic regions (Weichert 2009; Ohanyan 2015). Also consequential was whether regions are made by conflict or cooperation between regional states (Ohanyan 2015, 2018). Importantly, arguments on their politically constructed nature also permeated across disciplinary divides. Ruggie's claim that space is a social construct that people invent (1999) was bolstered by behavioral theories of geography which showed geographic regions as shaped and reshaped by political practice (Katzenstein 2005).

These debates, particularly those in political science, suffered from one significant blind-spot. It related to the question of who matters in regional construction. The "states or non-state actors" debate, which nourished the rise of "new regionalism" (Kelly 2007), unfolded within the state-centric analytical frames. Non-state actors and regions have been viewed as extensions to states, large or small. This study advocates for the imperial lens to understanding regional construction, and a deeper historical dive to excavate the imperial roots of regions, which predated the rise of states and the contemporary regions they formed.

To realize such a research path, we remain constrained in our conceptual tools to study regionalism, which are state-centric and designed to explain regional connectivity under the perceived anarchy in world politics. We lack theoretical instruments for a deeper historical analysis (Fawcett 2004) to uncover regional forms of engagement under hierarchy, when empires were the main building blocks of world connectivity. Considering the historical longevity of empires (von Hagen and Karen Barkey 1997), particularly relative to the nascent institutions of nation-states, this is a significant blind spot for those of us who are motivated by regional studies.

Against this backdrop, this study introduces the *regions-before-states* as a paradigm to broaden regional studies. It historicizes regional studies and uncovers the agency of non-state actors, often in the margins of imperial peripheries. The "new" regionalism in regional studies, which emerged in 1970s, turns out is not so new after all. The *regions-before-states* paradigm advocated here engages in concept development of fractured/resilient regions, with an empirical application on Eastern Anatolian Province of the late Ottoman empire, prior to the emergence of the state system in Eurasia. It builds on the theory of regional fracture and analysis of regional dynamics in politically divided conflict regions developed elsewhere (Ohanyan 2015, 2018). However, the concept development carried out here offers a fresh new tool kit, with measurable and variable dimensions of the concept of fractured regions. Earlier works on fractured regions (Ohanyan 2015, 2018) identified the imperial roots of fractured regions, but they fell short in producing a conceptual framework for comparative historical analysis of regions. This article is a step in this direction.

While causality is inherent to this concept, the empirical section is limited to applying the regional fracture theory to describing the shifting regional fabric of the eastern provinces in the Ottoman empire over time, in between its two constitutional periods. As such, testing the causality of this theory – the way regional fracture caused and/or facilitated a range of outcomes (such as the imperial collapse, genocidal violence, and ethnic cleansing, etc.) – falls outside of the remit in this work.

The concept development introduced in this work offers a framework of analysis for thinking about regional ties but one which can transcend the state-centric, Westphalian, approach to regional studies, to incorporate imperial peripheries as political regions and study their legacies in world politics (Eckhardt 1990; Torbakov 2017; Centeno and Enriquez 2010; Mattli 2000). The continuity in regional studies, which this study offers, between imperial and Westphalian regionalisms, so to speak, helps to elucidate regional politics as one that has been fraught and contested, rather than evolutionary towards EU-style regional integration, with strong states as its constituent units.

Regionalism Reconsidered

Social science scholarship has shown that territorial proximity and the regional neighborhood can be catalysts of armed conflicts, as well as solvents for growing democratization and economic

development (McCallister 2016; Gleditsch and Hegre 1997; Gibler and Braithwaite 2013; Maves and Braithwaite, 2013; Collier 2007). As such, they have established the enormous utility of the regional level of analysis in world politics (Volgy, Bezerra, Cramer, and Rhamey Jr. 2017). But while making great strides over the second half of the 20th century, the comparative regionalism scholarship has remained limited by its state-centric bias. Understandings of regions remained reduced to state formations over a geographic territory or an issue area (trade, security, public health, etc.). Regional integration emerged as a dominant policy prescription for security provision, resulting from the assumption that strong state capacity is a necessary first step to that end. Indeed, the gold standard of European integration has privileged conceptualizations of regions as composites of states, ideally strong ones, capable of engaging in regional forms and sustaining regional connections. *States-before-regions* was the key paradigm that shaped our thinking and practice when it came to regionalism and regional diplomacy in the 20th century.

States-before-regions

The state-centric bias in regional studies, particularly within political science, was partly a result of "system dominance" over regions (Katzenstein 2005): regions were viewed as spaces where great power relationships were playing out, with little room for autonomous regional behavior. Such realist approaches to regional studies emphasized strategic security as an organizing factor of regional politics, with strong states as central in that discourse. Weaker states were susceptible to overlay and penetration by great powers (Buzan and Wæver 2003), and strong states with advanced infrastructural power were viewed as critical for constituting regions able to withstand extra-regional overlay.

The state-centricity in regional studies was ameliorated somewhat with the growing recognition of non-state actors. In the 1970s, within this state-centric paradigm, "new regionalism" emerged as a new approach to theorize non-state actors as important drivers of regional engagement between state and societies (Mittelman 2000; Acharya and Johnston 2008). This "new" regionalism was also examined in the context of "hard" and "soft" regionalisms (Buzan and Wæver 2003). While the former was formal, and deliberately driven by states, the latter was more spontaneous and societal, bubbling from below, and driven by non-state civil society actors and business groups. This was in contrast to earlier debates which saw the governments in the driver's seat in regional engagement (Ohanyan 2015). Such state-centric approaches to regional studies had privileged formal versus informal institutions, and the politics between nonstate actors and business sector were viewed as marginal to regional studies.

The state-centric discourse in regional studies also expressed in the debates on space and territoriality as regional markers versus relations and functional basis of region formation. The search for regions and regional border delineation in the 1970s looked for all-encompassing definitions of regions, covering varied factors including security, economics, and identity, to name a few (Alagappa 1995; Väyrynen 2003). And these approaches, while recognizing territorial proximity as a regional marker, reduced the factor of space to territoriality and geographic proximity between states as regional constituents. Studies of territoriality in regional studies, within the state-centric discourse, glossed over sub-national actors and the connections and networks between them, as significant in political construction of regions between states. The power of connectivity and social networks in shaping regional construction (Cox 1997; Ohanyan 2015) was obscured within comparative regionalism.

This gap was remedied somewhat by the move towards more relational approaches which led to functionalist analysis of region formation. Especially within the "new regionalism" scholarship, regions are seen as flexible structures, dependent on social practices and interlocking social networks of collaboration and interaction, conflict and contestation (Solioz and Stubbs 2009; Ohanyan 2015). The move towards relational approaches of regional formation delineated the power of issue-based cooperation, such as security or trade, which often transcended geographic

location of participating states (Kelly 2007; Väyrynen, 1984). Regions started to be seen as flexible structures that are highly dependent on social practices and interlocking social networks of collaboration and interaction (Solioz and Stubbs 2009). Still, most of the states outside of the advanced industrialized world are able to project power only within limited geographic space, whether by threatening their neighbors militarily or creating refugee crises in their regions (Volgy, Bezerra, Cramer, and Rhamey 2017). And geographically defined regional insecurity remains an unfortunate marker of regional forms of contemporary politics (Buzan and Wæver 2003).

Despite significant strides in advancing regional studies, their state-centric bias has obscured the study of regional politics in many ways. Seeing regions as territorial and political extensions of states, the political asymmetries between advanced industrialized great powers and smaller states remained undertheorized. The drastically varied political capacity of states in overcoming territorial limits as well as pushing against hegemonic globalization projects, also remain critical to study. Most importantly, this approach of seeing regions as extensions of states also silenced the role of sub-national actors that have long operated regionally, often across territorial borders. The discovery of non-state actors within "new regionalism" albeit within the state-centric framework, did little to recognize the role that such actors played regionally, before the rise of the nation-states in the aftermath of imperial collapse. In short, the state-centric bias in regional studies glossed over the imperial roots of region formation and disruption. It is this gap which motivates this work.

The state-centric bias within comparative regional studies, even when factoring in the "spatial turn" in globalization studies (Brenner 1999), viewed space in static terms, as a "pregiven, unchanging territorial platform upon which social action occurs" (Brenner 1999, 41). This state-centric "territorial trap" (Agnew 1994; Wallerstein 1996; Jonas 2012) was manifest in comparative regional studies in historically narrow emphasis on political statehood as a factor in shaping the regional fabric of politics. The centrality of states in shaping political regions, whether over specific geographic terrains or over functionally determined issue integration, rested on neo-liberal assumptions of regional integration, evolutionary and unidimensional direction of that integration.

This state-centric territorial trap has obscured contemporary regional politics, particularly in conflict areas (Ohanyan 2015). Privileging states as key political actors, this approach offered little to explain the growing agency of specific political regions, relative to great powers intruding in them. In challenging state-centric understanding of political life, political geography has been particularly effective in showing that politics is not exhausted by state actions, and that spatial aspects of power can strengthen and dilute the political power of states as territorial containers of political contestation (Delaney and Leitner 1997; Agnew 1993). Differentiating between different political scales of activity, political geography has highlighted the 'underimposed' scales of daily life (household, street, community) (Bird 1989), which are actors and sites of political life normally under-studied within state-centric approaches to regional studies.

Within comparative regional security studies, the Regional Security Complex theory (RSC), cognizant of territorial proximity of states, has argued that regions are formed by persistent insecurities between states. Perpetually dependent on extra-regional overlay from major powers, this approach situated any changes in the regional fabric to the distribution of political power between regional states. This state-centric approach does not explain the current dynamics in many regions around the world. For example, while unintegrated, Central Asia as a political region, has worked to challenge Russian dominance in the region, while also complicating the entry of China as a new player (Cooley 2012; William, Lobell, and Jesse 2012). Understanding the political agency of regions that are un-integrated, in contemporary multi-polarity in world politics, remains a glaring gap in the literature. Viewing such regions as regional security complexes, defined by their instabilities and insecurities, also has left many layers of regional politics unexplained. The question as to who matters in shaping regional politics requires a more inclusive theorizing, one that can transcend territorial trap of the modern state.

Importantly, state-centric regional analysis is ahistorical in nature. It does not offer tools to interrogate the regional roots of contemporary nation-states, particularly in formerly imperial

peripheries. In the context of postcommunist Eurasia, the state-building in the aftermath of the Cold War is viewed in the political shadow of the Soviet collapse. Pre-Soviet imperialism, expressed in imperial regional forms, remains unacknowledged in state formation.

Regions-before-states

Within the *regions-before-states* framework advanced here, the states are viewed as territorial and political extensions of political regions, often in imperial peripheries. This approach recognizes the imperial roots of contemporary state weakness, armed conflict and range of other political outcomes. Studying the role of "nonstate" agency can produce fresh framing and novel conceptualization of the regional fabric in world politics. In doing so, regional agency of various organizations, operating within administratively structured spaces of imperial peripheries, becomes clearer. As such, the role of these sub-imperial actors in shaping the contemporary contours of regional politics emerges as different from the study of non-state actors within the contemporary state-centric "new regionalism" scholarship, reviewer in the previous section.

This more historical research pathway transcends the primacy of state as the key constituent of regional formation: it points to the variance and diversity in the institutional forms of regional connectivity in imperial peripheries, which predetermined the political strength and institutional durability of contemporary states. By deploying the imperial lens to regional studies, this study reveals the regional agency of non-state actors before and after imperial collapse in Eurasia. Importantly, this *regions-before-states* paradigm shows that state weakness is a product of regional fracture in imperial provinces, rather than the other way around. Excavating the imperial roots of contemporary regionalism is particularly significant for understanding political dynamics in contemporary regions which are engulfed in armed conflicts of various longevity and intensity. The state-centric analysis of such regions has been quick to reduce them to zones of insecurity, or have dismissed any regional fabric in such spaces, considering the lack of regional integration in them (Ohanyan 2015).

This approach to thinking about contemporary regions offers historical continuity between contemporary and imperial forms of regional politics. Regions here are understood as historically evolved social processes, which grew out of institutionalized practices and power relations over a specific geographic terrain (Paasi 2004). And regions with sparse organizations and insufficient connectivity between them constitute a particular category of regional systems: fractured regions. In such regions, relationships and connections within a specific territory are made and remade over time between various units, characterized with different levels of coherence and density of ties between them.

Indeed, fractured regions discussed in this work are geographic formations at their core. Born out of imperial interface and friction, fractured regions evolved out of imperial borderlands and shatter zones (Bartov and Weitz 2013). While geographically determined, their political construction is a key feature in their formation. As such, some of the drivers of regional fracture include divide-and-conquer policies exercised by imperial centers, as well as by external powers active in such provinces. The concept of political scaling, developed within political geography (Paasi 2004), helps to conceptualize both internal as well as external drivers of regional fracture in imperial peripheries.

Scales in political geography are defined as spatial containers and arenas, scaffolding of sorts, where contested and continually evolving sociopolitical struggles between various groups (Berndt 2000: Crump and Merrett 1998; Swyngedouw 2000; Zeller 2000; Brenner 2001). Fractured regions, in their geographic scale, represent nested hierarchy of bounded spaces of differing sizes, ranging from local, regional to global (Delaney and Leitner 1997). And fractured regions were regularly subjected to extra-regional influences from neighboring powers, reaffirming the nested nature of political hierarchies in which they were embedded. As nested and bounded spaces of political activity, fractured regions possess relational attributes. Different levels of scales interact to produce and incentivize political action (Miller 1994).

Political regions, as relational systems at their core, are constructed over specific socio-spatial territories. As such, their properties, to be discussed below, are variable on a continuum between fracture and resilience. Furthermore, fractured regions can be thought of as areal concepts (Howitt 2003) defined by specific geographic contours and boundaries. As political peripheries in empires, such geographic contours are established by imperial parameters of administrative governance, as well as population concentration in specific geographic areas. But fractured regions also represent nested hierarchies of political activities: hierarchical relations between specific units constituting the regions, and their relations with extra-regional players, reveal the relational and associative dimension of fractured regions (Howitt 2003).

As "singular scaling" (Brenner 2001), fractured region result from the production, reconfiguration or the political contestation of socio-spatial organization within a given geographically bounded area (Brenner 2001). Such contestation and political construction as a singular scaling process takes place between various social organizations, such as communal groups, professional associations, political parties, to name a few. Higher levels of coherence of these organizations and more intense the relationships between them, the lower the levels of fracture within a given region, and regional resiliency more pronounced.

Indeed, from constitutional assemblies of ethno-religious groups and revolutionary parties in the Ottoman Empire (Göcek 2015; Barkey 2008; Campos 2011; Der Matossian 2014, Ketsemanian 2020) to the professional associations and political parties in the Habsburg Empire, there is a rich diversity of local actors that have carved out regional spaces of political activity. Against this backdrop, the "new" regionalism in contemporary regional studies requires a broadening of analysis to appreciate the regional politics of local actors, before the rise and the consolidation of the nation-state system in Eurasia. The regional fracture theory developed in this work points to this old "new" regionalism of non-state agency, which had made the imperial provinces both more peaceful as well as violent, with historical reverberations felt across contemporary politics (Makdisi 2000).

But fractured regions are also plural systems of scaling: as such, they represent production, reconfiguration and contestation of various hierarchies among scales (Brenner 2001). Fractured regions, in "plural scaling" (Brenner 2001), are systems with differentiated spatial units which are embedded in broader, and larger regional systems (Brenner 2001). Fractured regions are made and re-made by differentiation and hierarchies, recalibration and re-organization between units within fractured regions, as well as with extra-regional actors. The plural scaling helps to conceptualize the role of extra-regional actors in shaping regional dynamics, which tends to vacillate between fracture and resilience, to be discussed below.

The utility of plural scaling in regional formation allows one to assess the impact of extra-regional actors on the regional fabric, as well as to recognize the agency of local actors in region formation. Returning to the question of "who matters in shaping regional politics," the regional formation through political scaling shows that many actors matter, and that the roles they play can shift historically, over time and space, and scales of political activity.

The understanding of hierarchy and plural exercise of regional scaling are central to the *regions-before-states* paradigm developed here. There are no conceptual tools in political science in order to analyze, compare and contrast the processes of region formation over time. The "territorial trap of statehood" has limited the analytical scope of contemporary regional analysis. The synthesis of imperial lens and the post-colonial literature, with comparative regionalism studies, therefore, is essential to move forward. In addition, scaling as singular and plural regional geography (Taylor 1988), offers a specific pathway in that regard.

The Imperial Lens for Contemporary Regionalism

Conceptualizing the imperial peripheries as political regions offers a fresh new pathway through which to examine the regional agency of sub-imperial/sub-state actors in imperial polities. Imperial

peripheries were bounded geographic spaces, and expressed in singular scaling. More importantly, thought of their political construction through plural scaling processes, the extra-regional influences from neighboring empires becomes easier to conceptualize and assess. This approach synthesizes the studies of empires and post-colonial studies on the one hand, and comparative regionalism on the other. The gulf between the two has become too glaring in order to investigate the imperial legacies of contemporary regional fracture, particularly for contemporary region-building processes and development of state capacities.

The empire lens in IR has been short on comparative analysis. Still, it has been effective in challenging the linearity of anarchy as a dominant organizing concept to explain world politics in IR. Indeed, the scholarship on empires in political science has recognized the hierarchical nature of relationships between states, both large and small (Cooley 2008; Zarakol 2017; Barkawi 2017; Nexon and Wright 2007). In theorizing hierarchy in world politics, chiefly within the framework of imperial "orders," some have relied on organizational and institutional studies to deconstruct the causal impact of hierarchy on world politics. Drawing on network theory, Nexon and Wright (2007) explain that when the study of political relations takes on an imperial cast, the dynamics of divide-and-rule replace traditional balance-of-power politics. While the latter can be helpful in explaining the foreign policies of a rising China or resurgent Russia, it tells us little about "small wars" (Barkawi and Laffey 2006) and regional fractures. Areas of contemporary armed conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa, and many parts of postcommunist Eurasia, are postimperial spaces. Yet frameworks to study the role and influence of formerly imperial powers in these conflict regions, either as factors in conflict or cooperation, remain marginal in IR (Halperin and Palan 2015; Kumar 2017). The framework of analysis offered in this work, and the concept development on fractured regions, allows to trace, compare and contrast the institutional fabric of regions, historically over time and space. The dearth of such tools within comparative regionalism and the persistent state-centricity in that scholarship have limited historically more informed scholarship of regional politics, particularly in contemporary regions of conflict and insecurity.

Currently fractured regions, such as the South Caucasus, the Western Balkans, or the Middle East, are postimperial formations (Ohanyan 2018). In this context, the TRF adds value to these conversations in delineating the internal characteristics, systemic effects on world politics, and network attributes of formerly imperial peripheries. It shows formerly imperial peripheries, old and new, formal and informal, as independent structures of their own, capable of exerting pressure on their previously imperial cores, which have reconstituted themselves as regional powers in world politics. While concurring with network perspectives in the study of hierarchy in world politics, TRF casts light into the "black box" of regions, enabling a comparative institutional analysis of their connectivity attributes across space and time. Drawing from comparative regional studies, TRF fills an important gap within the "empire turn" debate in IR (Shirk 2017). It identifies the imperial roots of regional politics predating the state system. And this pathway then broadens and historicizes the contemporary regional studies, thereby ameliorating its persistent euro-centricity.

Concept Development Methodology

The concept development on fractured/resilient regions carried out in this article builds on my earlier work on regional fracture theory, in the context of Russian foreign policies in postcommunist Eurasia and the Middle East (Ohanyan 2018). While that study was primarily descriptive, it did sketch out key propositions of ways in which contemporary fractured regions create and facilitate armed conflicts, derail development and democratization in young states. Importantly, it has shown the agency of fractured regions in shaping Russian policies in its "near abroad". This article offers more granular approach to concept development of fractured regions, one which defines fractured regions as political systems with key and measurable attributes. At this time this work does not engage in hypothesis testing, but is limited to methodology of concept development, which then can be taken up by others for hypothesis testing. Whether, and if so, to what extent do fractured regions lead to armed

conflicts, for example, would be one such avenue. Also promising for theory development relates to the way fractured regions impact and shape democratization outcomes in regional states. However, concept development is a first step before causality and correlation can be attempted.

There are two dominant forms of concept development practiced in social sciences: (1) necessary and sufficient condition, and (2) family resemblance (Goertz 2006). The necessary and sufficient condition is the method used in this work when developing the concept of regional fracture, in order to delineate this concept from its alternatives, some of which were discussed earlier.

Conceptual Alternatives

Within realist scholarship on balancing and alliance politics, *wedging* (Crawford 2011) is one concept comparable to regional fracturing. Crawford defines it as a "state's attempt to prevent, break up, or weaken a threatening alliance at an acceptable cost. When the strategy is successful, the state (i.e., the divider) gains advantage by reducing the number and strength of enemies organized against it" (2011, 156). Similar to regional fracture as a foreign policy strategy (Ohanyan 2018), wedging as a concept focuses on the strategic and deliberate undoing of an existing tie. In this work, Crawford found that "selective accommodation" of one adversary in an opposing alliance is more effective as a foreign policy strategy than confrontation and coercion.

In contrast to "wedging," which is a relational and "singularly scalar" concept, fractured regions are both relational and geographic systems, "plurally scalar," as discussed earlier. As such, they refer to regional systems as structures that shape incentives for alliance formation between states and sub-state actors. Viewing regions, fractured or not, as distinct systems of political organization, the TRF shows that a wedging strategy can be applied within regions by regional states as well as by powers external to the region. In both cases, the effectiveness of wedging, as a state-level variable, will be shaped by the levels of regional connectivity, often societal ones. Such regional connectivity can enable or constrain wedging as a strategy. In short, the institutional and multi-level dimension of fractured regions matter in the way dyadic alliances or wedging strategies play out.

Other concepts that can be considered as equivalents to fractured regions, and ones developed for imperial contexts, include "borderlands," "frontiers," and "shatterzones." In contrast to "wedging," all of these concepts emphasize the territoriality as opposed to politically constructed nature of such regions. Shatterzones (Bartov and Weitz 2013), are useful in highlighting imperial peripheries as distinct units of analysis. As such, these studies have shown the hybridity of politics in such regions, pointing to long periods of peaceful coexistence between multiple ethno-religious groups and nationalities, interrupted by periods of violence, generated from inter-communal friction as well as external great power conflagrations. However, they lack comparative and variable sets of attributes to explain the sources and drivers of conflict and concord within these regions.

Importantly, the shatter zone concept is somewhat deterministic in terms of territoriality and confined to the imperial period of world history. Much of the violence in such regions is usually ascribed to the geographic location of the shatter zone within the imperial borderland (Reynolds 2011; Bartov and Weitz 2013). Fractured regions, in contrast, while territorial entities, are defined as politically constructed regions first and foremost. The theory of fractured regions introduced here does not test causality at this time, but its key attributes, dimensions and indicators, allow for comparisons across time and space. Following the scholarship on research methodologies (Goertz 2006), causality has been integrated into concept development for fractured regions. This causality and the variance in the key dimensions of the concept, offer the added conceptual value relative to shatter zones, which does not allow variance or causality in its dimensions.

Negative Cases

The next step in concept development relates to identifying the "negative" concept and case selection (Goertz and Mahoney 2006). Goertz points out the need for new concepts and theoretical

causality to produce a wide research range (2006). To capture the full range and variance of a concept, relevant cases must be selected and its positive and negative dimensions need to be identified, according to Goertz. The identification of the negative pole in the conceptual spectrum helps to sharpen the positive one.

Resilient (but not necessarily integrated) regions are the negative cases for fractured regions. Similar to fractured regions, resilient ones are also socio-spatial and politically constructed. As fractured regions, they are shaped by singular scaling over a specific bounded space. At the same time, they are also outcomes of plural scaling, which is hierarchical and nested in nature, with interactions and relations between various scales of politics among regional actors, as well as between these actors and extra-regional players. They differ from fractured regions in the variance of key dimensions. The constituent units in resilient regions are more coherent and institutionalized. The relationships and connectivity between them are also dense and durable. The plural scale of resilient regions is one of regional connectivity rather than disruption, best exemplified by divide-and-conquer policies applied by imperial centers in their peripheries or between various regional communities.

In contrast to fractured regions, resilient regions are better positioned to withstand stressors of various severity, such as famines, communal conflicts, wars, and genocides. Strong associative capacities and organizational infrastructures in resilient regions differentiate them from fractured regions of poor connectivity and associational vibrancy. They are superior as region-wide cooperation infrastructures.

Concept Dimensions and Indicators

The identification of the constituent units and second-level indicators is the third step in concept development carried out in this work. In terms of its constituent units, regional fracture expresses between states, inside states between government elites and various segments of the society, and extra-regional hegemonic powers with political stakes in the region. Fractured regions are socially constructed political systems: throughout various historical periods, imperial or postimperial, they have enabled imperial longevity (Doyle 1986) and have often served as buffer zones between empires, particularly in the Eurasian continent. Their systemic feature is manifest by the consistent behavior pattern it demonstrates over a long period of time, which is an indication that there is a "feedback loop" resulting in a similar behavior pattern within the region (Meadows 2008), as identified in systems theory.

Indeed, there are specific dimensions of regional fracture that distinguish it from alternative explanations. Table 1 below illustrates these dimensions and second-level indicators for regional fracture, which are grouped in terms of the constituent units in fractured regions (states, communities, etc.) as well as relationships between them. Considering the units and the relationships together allows us to develop the systems theory of regional fracture, moving forward (Meadows 2008).

Unit-Level Dimensions of Regional Fracture and their Indicators

The "organizational coherence" of the constituent units within a region refers to the ability of such units to organize in self-governance and enjoy legitimacy from their members. These organizations

Table 1. Second-Level Dimensions of the Regional Fracture Concept

Unit Level Dimensions	Relationships Between the Units
Unit organizational coherence	Hegemonic influences and overlay/geopolitical embeddedness
Organizational density and diversity of units	Unit coordination, intra-regional bargaining and security orders
	Systemic coherence of regional flows

are institutionally bounded arenas, which in cases of higher levels of coherence and communal legitimacy become important scales of political activity and social practice within the region (Paasi 2004; Marston 2000; Brenner 1998, 2001; Howitt 2003; Putnam 1994). Thus, higher levels of organizational coherence will reduce regional fracture, contributing to organizational resilience. As such, these indicators reflect the argument that regions and regional spaces of politics are not fixed, and that political scaling is a continuous process: changing levels of organizational coherence within organizations – constituent units of political regions – indicate the production and rescaling of regional politics over time (Brenner 2001).

Levels of self-governance and self-organization within states or social groups can be assessed differently within the Westphalian framework of regions composed of states, and imperial peripheries as political regions, predating the rise of the nation-state. The metrics of regionalism within the Westphalian framework, state strength/failure can be used to assess the level of organizational coherence exhibited by regional states. For imperial peripheries lacking in statehood, the organizational attributes of social groups and community organizations can be used to assess their organizational coherence. In more contemporary fractured regions, there is at least one state which lacks in public legitimacy. For example, states in a region that are authoritarian or competitive authoritarian in their forms of governance (Levitsky and Way 2006) tend to lack in public legitimacy. Lacking in legitimacy, the governing elites in such regions have the propensity to capture regional politics for their private gain, leaving the broader benefits of regional governance largely inaccessible to their populations.

The region-wide "organizational density and diversity" refers to the existence of players within states and communities, which have the capacity and mobility to cross borders (if the region is constituted from states) or inter-communal boundaries. The scarcity of organizations and their lack in diversity of forms is associated with higher levels of fracture in a given region. The Western IR scholarship, with its state-centric bias, has obscured the rich forms of self-organization and civil society that often pre-existed and predated the rise of the state system in world politics. The ability of state-less nations to self-organize and mobilize to express their political needs, interests, and rights within imperial peripheries or in contemporary world politics is a significant marker towards exploring the regional fabric in world politics. Higher levels of organizational density and diversity within a region strengthen the regional resilience, while their lower levels tend to make the region vulnerable to fracture.

Relationships between the Units

Within this system approach, this refers to regional fracture as a phenomenon and helps to delineate the significance of the units in producing or facilitating fracture in a given region. Assessing the relationship between constituent units in regions allows to capture the power of connections and relationships between units, which has become recognized as critical in the construction of political scales within geographic regions (Urry 2003; Castree 2003). The following types of relationships in the context of fractured/resilient regions are developed in this work. First, the "level of hegemonic influence" is an indicator that identifies the mechanisms of influences as exercised by external players in the broader geopolitical environment in which the region is embedded. Such mechanisms can also be assessed by the frequency and durability of their application. In regions with high levels of "overlay," (Buzan and Wæver 2003) described as the ability of extra-regional powers to determine political outcomes inside the region, the external players can have direct or intermediated influence over the region. The influence can be overt and direct, exercised through formal bilateral alliances with the states in the region. Another example of an overt and direct influence are the cases of fractured regions inside or in between imperial powers, where the imperial centers can directly, with varying degrees of success, shape the regional politics in their peripheries. Regardless of this methodological choice, the higher levels of extra-regional influences (benign or perverse) will

result in fracture, and the opposite outcome will produce regional resilience and regional empowerment in world politics.

Second, "region-wide unit coordination" is also an indicator focused on the relationships between the units. It refers to the ability of sub-regional actors, state or non-state, to coordinate their activities with one another within the region. Michael Doyle, in his comparative study of empires, argues that the trans-provincial trade within the Roman Empire, between its peripheries in particular, was instrumental for imperial integration and imperial durability (Doyle 1986; Kivelson and Suny 2017). Lower levels of region-wide coordination make the region more vulnerable to imperial fracture, a condition that was characteristic of the Soviet Union, where the inter-Republic economic relations were all wired via Moscow – the economic and political center of the Soviet Empire. Higher levels of region-wide coordination are associated with regional resilience and the lower ones with fracture.

Third, "intra-regional unit bargaining" (between state and non-state actors) refers to the propensity or existence of micro-bargains between units within the given fractured regions, in an effort to form alliances and to establish mini-security orders within the region. This indicator manifests in terms of two broad extremes or types of regional orderings: clustered connections between select players (fragmented and uneven security order) on the one hand, and cohesive (integrated and inclusive), on the other. Intra-regional bargaining with greater propensity to clustered ordering reveals a region vulnerable to fracturing: such a pattern creates gaps and divisions between various groups, thereby creating political vacuums for extra-regional players to fill. Cohesive patterns of intra-regional bargaining, in contrast, reflect regionally resilient political fabric.

Fourth, "systemic coherence of regional flows" is an indicator to determine the extent to which economic activities between the regional subunits cohere with existing political frameworks of engagement. Regional fracture tends to be associated with incoherent systemic flows, with economic forces (trade and tourism) often pulling in opposite directions from the political elites (state or non-state). Informal trade between Turkey and Armenia, with the border between the two countries closed, is one example of incoherent regional flows. In this dimension of regional fracture the higher levels of coherence are associated with resilience and the lower ones with regional fracture.

While the empirical section focuses on a single case – the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Anatolia as one of its peripheral regions – this is not a case study-specific analysis (Halperin and Palan 2015). The empirical section is an exercise in applying the TRF variables in a context of imperial politics. As a variable-based approach, the empirical section does not produce new primary material, nor does it offer any fresh overview or a granular analysis of a particular historical period in the Ottoman Empire: the historical case study approach would have been the route to take for that purpose. Instead, building on the existing historical case studies, the empirical section applies the regional fracture theory in terms of analyzing the Ottoman Anatolian imperial periphery as a political region.

The empirical section below combines qualitative methods of concept development (drawing from years of fieldwork in the Western Balkans, the South Caucasus, Russia, the United States, and the European Union) with historical, variable-based analysis of the Ottoman Empire. While the ultimate, long-term, goal in this research is to demonstrate levels of correlation and causality between regional fracture and armed conflict patterns, this work at the moment is limited to rigorous and systemic concept development to understand the phenomenon of regional fracture. Delineating between contemporary "Westphalian," and imperial regionalisms, is among the key theoretical implications for regional studies that follows from this work.

The empirical discussion presented below constitutes a heuristic case study (George and Bennett 2004; Eckstein 2002; Van Wynsberghe and Khan 2007), which is usually applied to identify variables, hypotheses, and causal paths. Such case studies are also applied to achieve conceptual validity (George and Bennett 2004), an essential step towards theory development. The concept developed in this work, applied in the Ottoman/Anatolian case, helps to achieve the following goals. First, it advances the *regions-before-states* approach to the study of regional fabric of politics, discussed earlier in the article. With this application of the key concept dimensions and indicators to

this particular case, this work is an analytical exercise for studying imperial peripheries as political regions, thereby identifying imperial legacies in contemporary regional politics. This is a dramatic departure from the comparative regional studies, where state-centric bias has prevented a deeper historical dive, predating World War II (Katzenstein 2005), to examine political regions.

Second, while this case study does not offer causal inferences and hypothesis testing, it does chart new research pathways down the road to examining the regional fracture, with its imperial legacies, as a contributing or a causal factor for armed conflict in contemporary eastern Turkey. As such, this approach creates an opportunity to rethink the contemporary Kurdish conflict, as well as the Turkey-backed Azerbaijani offensive on Armenian forces in the 44-day war in 2020 in the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Third, the particular historical period selected for this case study falls between two constitutional periods in the Ottoman empire. The period under study was one of renewed repression and centralization in the empire, which resulted in the suppression of communal organization in its political peripheries. This therefore was a period of deepening regional fracture in the peripheries, which is used as a heuristic case study in this work. Whether this deepening regional fracture contributed or caused the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman empire is beyond the scope of this work, albeit this case study offers the opportunity to examine this link between regional fracture and the genocidal violence in the Ottoman empire in its twilight years.

Dimensions of Regional Fracture in the Late Ottoman Empire

At the turn of the 20th century, the peripheries of the empire stretched into three continents, with the population reaching thirty million (Üngör 2011). The Ottoman Empire, as was most of its contemporary imperial states, was expansionist, territorially vast, and coercive in its imperial governance. And similar to its contemporaries, the Ottoman Empire has been rather "rimless," often organized via indirect and intermediated center-periphery relations (Nexon and Wright 2007; Barkey 2008; Kumar 2017). The hub-and-spoke model of power organization has been a signature feature of imperial governance, and has also been observed throughout the Ottoman history (Barkey 2008). Such organizational patterns of imperial organization lent itself to a vertical/hierarchic system, in which peripheral entities primarily communicated with the core. Any communication between the peripheries was intermediated through the center, creating deep regional cleavages in its peripheries as a result.

The regional fracture in the peripheries was woven into the political fabric of this imperial state. Its military-agrarian society is often described as one with low levels of integration in economy, administration, and culture (Üngör 2011). Since the early 18th century, and similar to its contemporaneous empires, the Ottoman Empire struggled to manage its multi-ethnicity, vacillating between periods of gradual reform and authoritarian reversals, most evident in the 19th century. The empire degraded into long cycles of violence in its peripheries since the 18th century (Göcek 2015; Morris and Ze'vi 2019; Üngör 2011; Rogan 2016; Kévorkian 2011), culminating in the Armenian genocide and ethnic cleansing of its Christian minorities in Eastern Anatolia in the early 20th century (Göcek 2015; Bloxham 2007; Akçam 2012; Suny 2015; Balakian 2004; Kieser, Polatel, and Schmutz 2015). But it also exhibited periods and peripheries of relative confessional coexistence – social peace – under the Muslim hegemony (Barkey 2008; Makdisi 2019; Campos 2011). The *millet* system is the imperial governance method that enabled such confessional coexistence throughout the empire's centuries-long rule.

Indeed, despite its vertical power organization and poor connectivity in its peripheries, the Ottoman Empire is often lauded for its cultural pluralism. The *millet* system is the center of such arguments, which highlight the tacit bargain between the institutional center of the empire, built around Islam, and the rest of the confessions and ethnic groups. This social contract, the argument goes, acknowledged Muslim dominance and its social hegemony in return for relative self-governance and autonomy for the different confessional groups. The non-Muslim communities,

Greek Orthodox, Armenian, and Jewish, were largely self-governing. They were protected by the state in return for paying a special tax, agreeing not to bear arms, and wearing special clothing to differentiate them from the Muslims (Göcek, 2015). Fatma Gocek notes that since the non-Muslim communities were not allowed to serve in the military, they ended up concentrating in trade and commerce. Muslims specialized in administration (*mülkiye*), legal and religious affairs (*ilmiye*), and the military (*seyfiye*). Karen Barkey (2008) has reflected on the administrative value of the *millet* system by pointing out that it fulfilled several goals for the imperial elite. It ensured the loyalty of a growing Christian community with important economic skills. In addition, it offered legibility and order in imperial governance. Barkey also highlights that the *millet* system also enabled the administration to run smoothly, particularly regarding tax collection, "while also reinforcing the wedge between the Orthodox and Catholic worlds of Europe" (Barkey 2008, 131).

The application of the TRF to the Ottoman Empire under the *millet* system reveals that the system, while often celebrated for managing diversity, was also deeply divisive on the regional fabric in the peripheries. This regional dimension made the *millet* system a liability when the imperial center tried to modernize and centralize imperial governance in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The *millet* system created, maintained, defended, and stratified the ethno-religious differences within the multinational empire (Barkey 2008), with deep inter-confessional polarization in peripheral regions.

The *millet* system was consequential in shaping the center-periphery relations and the regional fabric in the provinces. Particularly during the Tanzimat reforms in the 19th century, the *millet* system added greatly to the organizational diversity and density of units – important markers of regional resiliency discussed earlier. During the Tanzimat period in the mid-19th century, encouraged by the currents of reform and attempts at constitutionalism within the empire, many ethno-religious minorities experienced a cultural renaissance within their communities. National Assemblies within these communities were created (Rodrigue 1994), which later developed constitutions and governance structures; schools and institutions of higher education were founded; political parties were formed; and divisions within the communities between traditional and progressive groups and forces were also observed (Der Matossian 2014). Similar to the Armenian community, Jewish and Greek communities within the empire were also transformed by the Tanzimat reforms. The Jewish progressive movement emerged within the Jewish *millet*. Following the edict of 1856, all non-Muslim communities were encouraged to establish assemblies comprised of their religious and nonreligious elements to conduct their affairs internally (Der Matossian 2014). Within the Jewish community this culminated in the Jewish constitution in 1865. This communal revival and the promise of constitutionalism it engendered was abruptly halted by Sultan Abdülhamid II, who prorogued the parliament in 1878 for thirty years. This first period of representative democracy ended in another wave of authoritarian reversal, accompanied by state violence against predominantly Christian minorities (Morris and Ze'vi 2019; Bebler 2017; Göçek 2015), against the backdrop of their diminished representation in the center as well as in the provinces.

Göçek suggests that the 19th century reforms had limited impact for improving administration and/or equal rights for the non-Muslim minorities. The reforms diversified the units of organization within the multi-ethnic empire – a key dimension within the TRF, reflecting enhanced regional resilience – but they failed to add to their value as effective political units of self-governance and representation. The organizational coherence of units within regions, another dimension of regional fracture, was insufficiently enhanced by the Tanzimat reforms because they lacked the popular legitimacy within their communities, Göçek states. She explains that these new units of representation provided the elites within the minority communities with enhanced political access to the center, noting that these elites already had good relations with the imperial core. Combined with the persistent unwillingness of the center to share power locally, the reform potential remained marginal. In the end, in addition to reproducing the status quo, the Tanzimat reforms deepened familiar imperial practices of ruling through elites, resulting in the perpetuation of regional fracture in the peripheries.

Importantly, the *millet* system was based on imperial "differential contracting," which wired connectivity from various ethno-religious groups directly to the imperial government, eroding intra-regional and inter-confessional connections within the peripheries. The next section on Eastern Anatolia will delve into this issue more directly. At this point, suffice it to say that the assessment of the regional fabric reveals that the Tanzimat reform efforts in the 19th century, geared toward centralization of power and the advancement of equality between all ethno-religious groups, worked at cross-purposes. The lack of institutionalized connections between ethno-religious communities and the weakness of regional governance spaces worked to undermine the modernization efforts in the 19th century. The Eastern Anatolia, in between the two Constitutional periods, 1876–1914, reveals the way regional fracturing ended in genocidal violence directed against the Armenian and other Christian communities of the empire.

The inter-ethnic polarization made it nearly impossible for any intra-regional security bargains, a dimension of regional fracture/resilience, between communities and provinces to emerge. The imperial state, in its zeal to modernize and centralize, increasingly relied on nationalism and religion, expecting diverse communities to fall in line with religious ideology (Göcek 2015). This approach resulted in social networks closing in along religious and ethnic boundaries (Barkey 2008). Building on the existing institutional separation created by the *millet* system, the centralization elevated the Muslim communities further, geared to match their military-political dominance with enhanced economic status in the empire. The Christian communities, with inferior access to the imperial economy and levers of political power, had oriented themselves toward and integrated with Western trade networks in the 19th century, forming the early economic bourgeois class in the urban areas, albeit with no political power (Levy 1992).

The Ottoman peripheries were deeply fractured regions at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, also because of the systemic incoherence of regional flows – economic, political, and social. As discussed earlier, non-Muslim trade networks oriented toward Western markets because of the lack of access to power and economic institutions domestically. These communities were trans-national, connecting the entrepreneurs and traders from the Ottoman Empire to European markets. Under pressure from the increasingly nationalist policies of the imperial state, these groups relied on their ethnic communities both for self-governance as well as routes of global networks and pathways to connect with global markets (Aslanian 2014). Muslim communities dominated the military-political levers of power, eager to capture the economic gains from globalizing the world economy at the time. Such extra-regional influences undermined the systemic coherence of regional flows – a key marker of fractured regions, then and now.

Also reflecting the systemic incoherence of regional flows is the transnational movement of revolutionaries, such as Armenians or Kurds, who have crisscrossed the Ottoman, Russian, and Persian Empires in the beginning of the 20th century, resulting in the movement of ideas and ideologies throughout the imperial peripheries, as demonstrated by Berbarian (2019). Such transimperial revolutionary activities, cultivated in imperial provinces and culminating in the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, were a vivid demonstration that the margins matter when it comes to imperial governance.

Indeed, the divergent regional flows in the Ottoman Empire in between the two constitutional periods took ethno-religious forms. The strategy of mobilizing Turkish nationalism by the Ottoman states in its twilight years proved ineffective at preventing imperial collapse, with fatal consequences for millions of citizens of the Ottoman state. Regional fracture was practiced for imperial control, resulting in economic loss, humanitarian disasters, and the institutional erosion of the Ottoman state.

Eastern Anatolia: From Shatter Zone to a Fractured Region, 1876–1914

Eastern Anatolia in the Ottoman Empire, in between the two constitutional periods, is a quintessential case study to demonstrate the politically constructed, as opposed to geographically determined, nature of borderlands. Eastern Anatolia is portrayed as a shatter zone between the Ottoman

and Russian Empires (Klein 2011; Reynolds 2011; Bartov and Weitz 2013), a geographic space where Ottoman and Russian forces have clashed in the 19th and early 20th century. It is discussed as a target of the Ottoman Empire's civilizing projects, as part of its internal colonialism (Klein 2011) directed against the Kurdish tribes in its twilight years. It is also identified as a neglected frontline of World War I (Rogan 2016) and a space of "total war" carried out by the Ottoman Empire, fought in its exterior and in the interior (Kieser 2015). Despite its shared features with a number of other imperial borderlands, Eastern Anatolia stands out as a case of multifaceted regional fracture leaving its communities vulnerable to ethnic cleansing and state-sponsored genocidal violence unleashed on the Ottoman Armenians and other Christian communities by the empire in its twilight years.

Mechanisms of regional fracture in Eastern Anatolia were numerous. As a regional system, throughout the 19th century Eastern Anatolia witnessed a surge of associations and political organizing, a process that was rooted in the *millet* system of confessional tolerance under Muslim hegemony. These developments added to the organizational complexity, diversity, and depth of the regional fabric in Eastern Anatolia. The Tanzimat reforms, despite their limited success in advancing constitutionalism and parliamentary politics in the empire, contributed to the prolifer-ation of ethno-religious civil societies in all *millets* of the empire. The mobilization of interest groups, political parties, trade associations, and religious institutions, to name a few, added to the organizational diversity and coherence in the empire's provinces, including Eastern Anatolia.

Despite the growing organizational diversity and density, the unit coordination and bargaining between the ethno-religious groups in Eastern Anatolia remained lacking. The opposite was true: the divided societal fabric in Eastern Anatolia was politicized by the imperial government as divide-and-conquer instruments applied in two distinct policy areas: agrarian and security provision via irregular militia. Both of these issue areas, deeply intertwined, represented the most elemental aspects of social contracts which usually underpin the relationships between the government and the governed in any organized polity: taxation and raising revenue from the societies to provide for their security.

The agrarian question in Eastern Anatolia refers to the land grabbing from Armenian as well as Kurdish peasants by state agents, the Muslim population, Kurdish tribal leaders, and local Muslim notables (Kieser, Polatel, and Schmutz 2015). It was hardly a new problem in Eastern Anatolia, but it became securitized and politically contested particularly during the Second Constitutional period. Klein (2011) describes the "agrarian question" as a euphemism to refer to the usurpation in the last two decades of the 19th century, of Armenian lands, mostly by Kurdish tribal chiefs. The linkages between agrarian reform and security deterioration for predominantly Armenian peasants in Eastern Anatolia was driven by various factors. Gocek (2015) and Klein (2011) highlight the significance of the rise in agricultural capitalism across Europe, which reverberated in these provinces by the growing value of land.

In addition, the recurrent attempts by the empire to gain greater control over the provinces and the largely nomadic Kurdish tribes led to the efforts to sedentarize the Kurdish tribes. Co-optation of the Kurdish tribal leaders with special privileges, appointments, special lease-holding (*tapu*) rights, and land-for-settlement deals with tribal figures were some of the strategies with regional ramifications attempted by the imperial government. Additional efforts to co-opt the Kurdish communities, interlinked with the land grabbing practices, was the formation of irregular militia forces from the Kurdish communities, named after the Sultan himself – the Hamidiye cavalry units. Klein (2011) argues:

> Just as the process of land-grabbing had been closely associated with the Hamidiye and the license accorded to its members by its patrons, so would the "agrarian question" remain intimately linked with the question of the Hamidiye and its role under the new regime. Moreover, by extension the "agrarian question" necessarily became connected to the larger matter of the state's relationship with the Kurdish *aghas* who had grown so powerful during the Hamidian period. (152 –153).

The political support provided to the Kurdish groups in the usurpation of lands from Armenian peasants helped to co-opt and gain the loyalty of the Kurdish community, which, along with Armenians, were regular targets of Russian innuendos of protection in this period. By seeking to empower the Kurdish tribes, the empire applied the familiar tactic of divide-and-conquer: the Sultan translated its political support for Kurdish-led land seizures from Armenian communities into an instrument of demographic engineering, seeking to push out the Armenian population from eastern provinces in an effort to consolidate Muslim presence. The Muslim Kurdish communities were viewed as less of a threat to the Sultan than the Christian Armenians. Indeed, Polatel (2015) explains that while Kurdish peasants also suffered at the hands of the Kurdish tribal leaders emboldened by the Sultan, the Armenian cases of dispossession were interwoven with massive violence, expressed in a violent series of events called the Hamidian Massacres in 1884–1886.

The establishment of the Hamidiye Cavalry by the Sultan reflects the external dimension of regional fracture, as it was a reaction to Russian efforts to co-opt the Kurdish community to create instability inside borderlands of the Ottoman Empire. Internally, by empowering one community, and doing so by way of extra-legal and informal channels, the regional and fragile societal balance between the Armenian and Kurdish communities was frayed, and clustered pockets of social peace and coexistence were undermined. With no institutional spaces of inter-ethnic bargaining in the region, the deployment of the Hamidiye Cavalry units was a case of the destructive use of social capital within the Kurdish communities.

Klein (2011) explains that the primary rationale for the Sultan in establishing the Hamidiye Cavalry units was the fear of external aggression from Russia. But many other contemporaneous observers and historians also point to the Sultan's motive of suppressing the activities of revolutionary groups from the Armenian communities and their calls for land reform. Largely driven by an attempt to bring in the Kurdish communities under the administrative reach of the empire, the Sultan ultimately made the community less governable, as it ceded the most elemental form of state power to an unaccountable force – monopoly over the use of force. The application of politically unaccountable violence by the Hamidiye Cavalry units, in communities already divided by problems of land grabbing and demographic engineering, became the ultimate manifestation of predatory governance in Eastern Anatolia.

These mechanisms of regional fracture applied tactically and deliberately by the imperial center in this borderland illustrates the politically constructed nature of these borderlands, the fractured regions, in contrast to viewing them simply as geographically determined shatterzones, merely doomed to be beyond imperial reach and vulnerable to external aggression. Klein (2011) points out that how states and local actors respond to political geography is more important than the inherent characteristics of that geographic terrain. The mechanisms of regional fracture discussed here explain the political responses from the imperial center to its borderland with neighboring Russia.

The great power reform agenda applied to the Christian and Kurdish communities in Eastern Anatolia between the two constitutional periods is an important expression of a key regional fracture dimension: hegemonic influence and geopolitical embeddedness of external powers in a given region. The great power initiatives meant to pressure the Ottoman Empire to reform the conditions of these communities were rooted in deeply structural socio-economic and political inequalities sustained by these minorities. Great power reform politics, and its specific focus on the Armenian Question, is a familiar mix of humanitarian concerns and naked realpolitik (Suny 2015). Not unlike the contemporary applications of humanitarian intervention by great powers, usually driven by parochial political interests in the target country, the reform politics dominated the regional relations in Ottoman peripheries. The Armenian Question was a recurrent political theme within the reform politics, applied externally and internally within the Ottoman Empire.

In his overview of the politics surrounding the Armenian Question, Der Matossian (2014) points to the 1878 Treaty of Berlin which sought to modify the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano. The Armenian Question was internationalized as the plight of the Armenian community emerged on the international agenda and became entangled with external pressures, geopolitical and humanitarian, on the Ottoman states. But it also became a litmus test for the political changes of modernization,

which the empire had been trying to advance. Der Matossian explains that massive demographic changes in Anatolia resulted in the immigration of Muslims from the Balkans and the Caucasus, many of these migrants having escaped inter-ethnic tensions and clashes from the Balkans. Between 1862–1882, the Muslim population of Anatolia increased by 40 percent. The majority of the migrants and refugees moved to mostly rural Eastern Anatolian provinces (or were led by the imperial regime), thereby creating friction with the Armenian peasants and making land a contested resource.

However, it is critical to point out that rapid demographic shifts and inter-ethnic tensions were made possible amid conditions of institutional decay of regional and imperial governance: the lack of representative institutions and parliamentary systems of any sort made it nearly impossible for peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms to emerge in these regions. The institutional weakness of the Ottoman Empire in accommodating the rising friction and mobilization of conflicting interests contributed to the internationalization of the Armenian Question in late 19th century.

The instrumentalization of the Armenian Question by the Ottoman rivals was rather swift. Suny (2015) has argued that the great power interest in the Ottoman Empire, often expressed through reform politics, was driven by their desire to control the straits connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. This made the Ottoman Empire a space where Western European powers could balance and contain Russian interests. The reform politics usually involved Great Britain, Russia, France, and Austria, with Germany professing an official neutrality or indifference toward the Armenians as they were eager to cultivate an alliance with the Ottoman state (Suny 2015).

In regards to the Caucasus, Russian political ambitions of the Ottoman reform in favor of Christians can be traced back to the early 19th century (Bloxham 2007). Seeking to influence the Ottoman Empire without destroying it (not unlike the current Russian policy in Eastern Ukraine), Russia declared itself the protector of the Christian communities after defeating the Ottomans on the battlefield. In the Caucasus, Bloxham dates Russian overtures to protect the Christians in Ottoman provinces to the 1833 treaty of "alliance and mutual defense" of Unkiar Iskelesi (Bloxham 2007; Jelavich and Jelavich 1993), from which the Russian position to protect the Ottoman Muslim Kurds and Ottoman Christian Armenians followed.

The reform agenda of outside powers had distinct implications for regional connectivity in Ottoman peripheries. They heightened expectations and created false hopes among the Christian communities, which suffered disproportionately as multi-confessional mechanisms of imperial governance continued to deteriorate (Morris and Ze'vi 2019). Such growing communal insecurity in the provinces made external overtures of reform politically effective for the great powers. In short, the multi-level analysis presented here recognizes the mutually reinforcing nature between the decay of imperial governance and the collective violence directed against Christian communities on the one hand, and the geopolitical calculations of external powers on the other.

This multi-level analysis contrasts with purely geopolitical analyses. Reynolds (2011) has argued that great power competition between the Ottoman and Russian Empires, particularly in their borderlands, is key to understanding the course of the history in Eurasia. The geopolitical rivalry, of which the reform initiative was one mechanism, according to Reynolds, was analytically more pronounced relative to nationalism, which many argued to be the key driver of imperial collapse. In regards to the 1908–1918 period, Reynolds notes the following:

> Ottoman and Russian imperial rivalry and insecurities interacted in a particularly complex form in Eastern Anatolia, which constituted a double borderland where the two empires blurred into each other in a zone distinct from the centers of both. The dynamics of global interstate competition spurred the two centers to extend their power into the region. In order to stave off great power – especially Russian – encroachment, the Unionists were determined to assert central control over and extract revenue and resources from the region. (2011, 46)

This geopolitical narrative, while capturing an important dimension of regional fracture in Eastern Anatolia, however, obscured the significance of local, national, and regional governance failures,

including predatory resource extraction, as a factor making external meddling a winning geopolitical strategy for great powers, often to the detriment of the communities they claimed to help. Bulutgil (2017) has challenged geopolitical narratives, pointing out that they tend to assume state leadership as ideologically uniform, often reduced to territorial expansion of the imperial state. In a comparative analysis of contested borderlands in the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian Empires, she has shown that the ideological and institutional structure of state leadership is an important factor in explaining the varied outcomes of minority treatment in contested borderlands during wartime. In short, in her analysis, ethnic cleansing and genocide do not emerge as inevitable historical outcomes explained by imperial strategic imperatives and often driven by geopolitical competition. Rather, the alternatives to the genocidal policies were silenced due to the nationalistic leadership assumed by the government at the time.[1]

The regional perspective presented here focuses on center-periphery relations, highlighting connectivity, institutional, and representative governance between the periphery and the center as essential for building regionally resilient provinces and necessary for imperial modernization reform. The perspectives as to how geopolitical rivalry politicized and used the Armenian Question and other reform initiatives to advance narrow political ends, is valuable in understanding the regional dynamics on the ground. But the specific nature of regional fracture in the periphery helps to understand the nature of geopolitical rivalry and its application in the peripheries. Specifically, Bloxham (2007) explains that the German position in regards to the Armenian Question was driven by German ambitions of its regional economic influence, for which it needed the approval of the Ottoman central government. In contrast, Russia's aim in 1913–14 was the extension of informal political control in Ottoman territory, an objective for which it needed influence over the Ottoman subjects in the imperial periphery rather than the government. In short, Russia's application of reform politics targeted the province of Eastern Anatolia, rather than the imperial center. Vertically, geopolitical rivalry deepened the center-periphery tensions in Eastern Anatolia (a process aided by the German factor). Horizontally, geopolitical rivalry heightened the existing inter-communal polarization (facilitated by the Russian factor). Therefore, a multi-level approach and an appreciation of interactivity between societal and geopolitical factors can produce the needed nuance on the question of reform politics and ethnic cleansing and genocide in Eastern Anatolia.

Conclusion

The concept development for the regional fracture phenomenon introduced in this work moves regional studies forward in three specific directions. First, it highlights that regions, including "borderlands," "in-between lands," and "shatter zones," are more than territorial aggregations. Rather, they are politically constructed systems, with distinct and varied patterns of connectivity over time and space. As political systems, they are co-constitutive with imperial cores/metropoles and contemporary great powers. While subjects in imperial governance, and vulnerable to great power interventions, they are also institutional actors with distinct agency and impacts on their imperial cores and thus constitute significant factors in shaping great power behavior.

Second, the concept development for regional fracture and its associated theory of regional fracture enables a deeper historical dive into the study of contemporary regional fracture. Frozen in Cold War polarity, much of the contemporary scholarship on comparative regionalism remains wedded to state-centric approaches, in which regional formations are extensions of states and state sovereignty. The theory of regional fracture offers specific pathways by which to expand and historicize our understanding of regional formations. The *regions-before-states* paradigm, introduced by this theory, also illuminates the political agency of traditional institutions of ethno-religious communities (Wig 2016), an area that has remained in relative obscurity within contemporary IR theories.

By engaging in concept development, this work points to new directions in probing theoretical causality between regional fracture/resilience on the one hand, and ethnic conflict and coexistence,

genocidal violence, imperial durability, and collapse on the other. The concept development with the variance and gradation in its indicators also offers avenues for comparative cross-sectional as well as longitudinal research, which then can help to challenge perspectives on the inevitability of violence and armed conflicts.

Lastly, such an expansive understanding of regional connectivity is also consequential in policy terms for explaining and analyzing shifting structures of polarity in world politics. Much of the existing scholarship in that area is focused on power transition projections, with shifting and fraying great power alliances between US, China, the EU, and Russia, to name a few. The agency of small states in such shifts remains under-theorized, and the independent agency of fractured regions on shaping such alliances, understudied. The concept of regional fracture and its varied second-level dimensions offers tools to explain the regional roots of great power transitions, while sketching the limits of great power politics in the 21st century. The agency of fractured regions, as levers and liabilities for great powers, will only increase over time, as the pandemic reshuffles world politics by exposing weaknesses in state capacities, large and small. Regional connectivity is an important third way between hyper-globalization and national tribalism for moving forward, but studies of the drivers that make regions developmental or predatory are overdue if balanced policies of regional statecraft are to emerge.

Note

1 Bulutgil's comparative analysis includes Austro-Hungarian empire/Italian minority, Ottoman empire/Armenians, and Russian empire/Muslims in South Caucasus. During World War I, each case produced temporary and limited relocation, ethnic cleansing and genocide, and localized massacres and unrealized plans for deportations, respectively. The structure of state leadership in each empire at the time and the prevalence of non-ethnic cleavages and opposition voices in the government are key explanatory factors of varied outcomes in regard to minority treatment during wartime. The genocidal outcome in the Ottoman Empire, in this framework, is not a result of geopolitical necessity, as the author points out. Rather, the persistent deterioration in Ottoman imperial governance in the form of crashing opposition and liberal alternatives is highlighted. The institutional deterioration, which had crippled the empire since the end of the First Constitutional period, further polarized inter-ethnic communal relations, and, importantly, destroyed representative institutions of political contestation. In this context, the Ottoman Empire saw the rise of political parties within parliaments, which allowed party politics to unfold.

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