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The Failed Housing Cooperative Project of the Oriental Savings Association: Housing and Urban Rent in Istanbul in the 1880s and 1890s

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Abstract

The role of housing cooperatives in the urban history of late Ottoman Istanbul has not been examined. This study examines the foundation and activities of one such cooperative, Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutiwn / Cemiyet-i Tasarrufiyye-i Şarkıyye (Oriental Savings Association), a company established by a group of Armenian entrepreneurs in 1886. The company aimed to purchase a large tract of waqf land in extra mural Istanbul, divide it into plots, and then sell them to its members through installments for the purpose of building residences. As the land gained value through the years of the company's operation, an increasing number of people from across different communal, occupational, and gender backgrounds subscribed to the project. However, the company remained an Armenian enterprise in the eyes of security-minded bureaucrats and, eventually, the activities of the company were put to halt due to the criminalization of Armenians in the 1890s. The short history of Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutiwn reveals the ways in which urban rent turned into a lucrative investment cutting across different social groups.

Keywords: housing cooperatives, capitalistic urbanization, urban rent, communal relations, Armenian Question

Cemiyet-i Tasarrufiyye-i Şarkıyye'nin Başarısız Konut Projesi: Geç Dönem Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Kent Rantı ve Kapitalist Şehirleşme

Özet

Osmanlı İstanbul'unun şehirleşme tarihinde kooperatiflerin rolü şu ana dek incelenmemiştir. Bu çalışma bu kooperatiflerden biri olan ve 1886 yılında Ermeni müteşebbisler tarafından kurulan Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutiwn / Cemiyet-i Tasarrufiyye-i Şarkıyye'yi inceleyecektir. Şirketin amacı sur dışında büyük bir vakıf arazisini üzerine geçirip parsellere bölerek, bu parselleri üyelerine ev yapılması amacıyla satmaktır. Arazi, şirketin faaliyetleri sonucu değer kazandığı için, şirketin üye sayısı ve üyelerinin etnik, dini, mesleki ve cinsiyet çeşitliliği de kısa sürede arttı. Fakat, bu gelişmelere rağmen cemiyet, güvenlik-merkezli politikalara sahip bürokratların gözünde bir Ermeni teşebbüsü olarak görüldü ve Ermenilerin bu dönemde kriminalleştirilmesinin sonucu olarak, cemiyetin faaliyetleri durduruldu. Cemiyet-i Tasarrufiyye-i Şarkıyye'nin kısa tarihi geç dönem Osmanlı İstanbul'unda kent rantının farklı sosyal grupları kesen kârlı bir yatırım aracı haline dönüşmesini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kooperatifler, kapitalist şehirleşme, kent rantı, cemaatler arası ilişkiler, Ermeni Sorunu

Among the members [of the association], there are high-rank ecclesiastical figures, state officials, moneylenders, merchants, architects, and employees of banks and other firms, as well as shopkeepers, artisans, workers, and people belonging to all the [religious] communities. Respective to their numbers, there are Armenians, Greeks, Muslims, Latins, Protestants and Jews [in the association].¹

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1 *Dndes* 4 (January 1887): 77. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

48 Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutiwn / Cemiyet-i Tasarrufiye-i Şarkiye (Oriental Savings Association, hereafter OSA) thus emphasized the confessional diversity of its members in its magazine, *Dndes*, in 1887. The association was a cross-confessional savings institution, established by a group of Armenian entrepreneurs in the mid-1880s. The OSA's mission was to promote the welfare of its members through different forms of savings. The primary goal, however, was the establishment of a settlement for its members in extra mural Istanbul, which would be named after the reigning Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II. The project was never implemented due to political developments thus it left no architectural and urban trace, neither physically nor on paper. However, the particular trajectory of the OSA constitutes an original case of land commodification, property speculation, and a housing vision that relied on the prevalent discourses of urban modernization in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The OSA is one of the earliest known examples of a housing cooperative project in late Ottoman Istanbul. The project relied on purchasing land on the margins of the city and organizing the construction of housing on that land. The OSA project was primarily a housing project that aimed to provide a modern, suburban setting for middle and the upper-middle classes. Similar projects were taking place at the time in Western countries such as the United States through similar saving associations.² The OSA's importance lay in its participation in this broader global phenomenon of urbanization in the period, namely, the growth of the real estate markets in the metropolitan cities. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of land speculation as the dominant form of urban economy in cities from New York and Paris to the urban centers in colonial India and China. Land speculation and the real estate market at once fueled and shaped urban expansion.³ Many enterprises across the world sought to capitalize on land speculation. Savings associations in the US or joint stock companies in Paris ran thousands of urban land development projects.⁴ For example, in Paris alone, between 1870 and 1900, there were over two hundred fifty companies engaged in real estate projects, a development which completely changed the urban layout of the French capital in the last quarter of the century.⁵ In Britain, about 1500–2000 building societies were active in that period. The majority, however, were terminating societies—that is, they were dismantled after the completion of the project.⁶ There is evidence that some Ottoman intellectuals followed these developments in the European cities closely as they recount how amazed they were by their visits to the construction sites of such companies.⁷ The OSA saw itself as part of these global developments; it compared itself with some and even claimed to be better than many in terms of the pace of its project.⁸ Thus the OSA was part of a shared form of urban development across the world in the late nineteenth century, namely the urbanization through the creation and distribution of urban rent; the speculative gains from land by increasing its value through development projects and the occasional use of political power for their facilitation.

What these savings associations and companies also did was to facilitate various actors' involvement in the real estate market through relatively small sums. Many individuals, not necessarily the elite, invested in the urban real estate market through these institutions. In the case of the OSA, various middle- and upper-middle-class Ottomans were promised ownership of land on part of which they could build their own house while selling the rest at a higher price. Thus, they would benefit from the raising estate values only through paying for their shares in the company. This promise was encapsulated in one single phrase: "Everyone will be able to own a house" (fig. 1).⁹

2 Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 100; Heather A. Haveman and Hayagreeva Rao, "Structuring a Theory of Moral Sentiments: Institutional and Organizational Coevolution in the Early Thrift Industry," *American Journal of Sociology* 102, no. 6 (May 1997): 1606–1651.

3 Debjani Bhattacharyya, "Speculation," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 1 (2020): 52.

4 David M. Scobey, *Empire City: The Making and Meaning of the New York City Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 112–114.

5 Alexia M. Yates, *Selling Paris: Property and Commercial Culture in the Fin-de-siècle Capital* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 6–7.

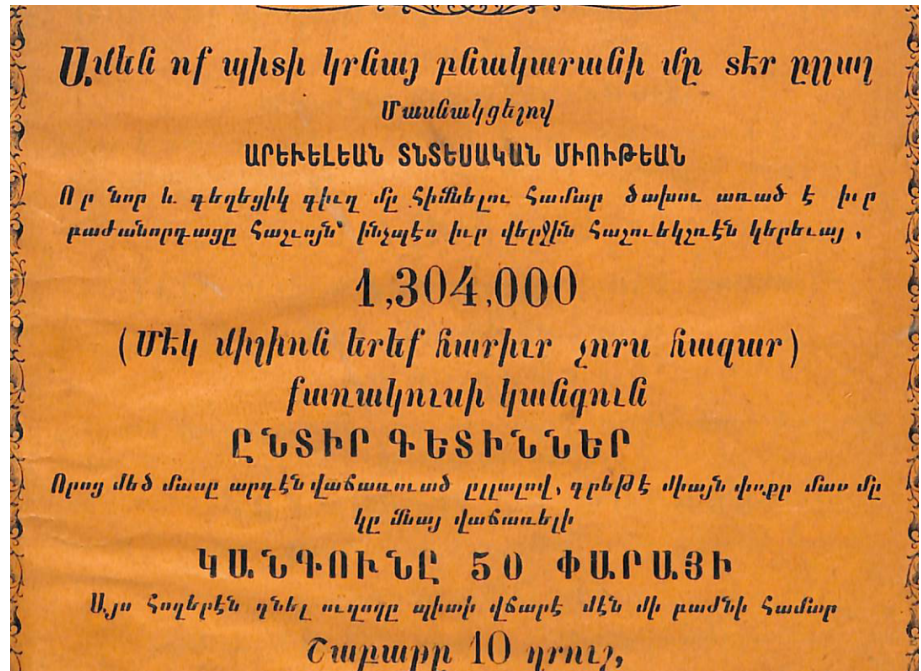
6 Richard Rodger, *Housing in Urban Britain, 1780–1890* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23–24.

7 Ahmet Cevat [Emre], *İktisâta İnkılâp: İstihlâk Teâvün Şirketleri* (Istanbul: Kitabhane-i İslâm ve Askeri-Ibrahim Hilmi, 1329), 84–96.

8 "Engerutiwn kağakagan dndesutyan" [Association of Political Economy], *Dndes* 5 (February 1887): 102–104; "Pağtadudiwn me" [A comparison], *Dndes* 11 (August 1887): 260.

9 *Yeremyay Değegakir Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutyân* (Constantinople: K. Bağdadliyan, 1889).

Figure 1: Cover of the report of the OSA (1899). The phrase was rendered in rhyme: “Amen vok bidi grna[,] pningarani me der ella” (Everyone can be an owner of a residence) (*Yeramyay Değegakir Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutyanyan*, cover).



What prompted the association to venture into this project was the expectation that the value of this agricultural land, which was owned by a waqf (an Islamic pious foundation), would considerably increase with the completion of the settlement, and generate major profits for the OSA members. This meant, first, the members of the OSA invested in a project that was still in the initial phase of purchasing the land. In other words, the investors spent their money in return for a promised future profit, which would come from urban land speculation. As this article will discuss, such a form of investment was only possible when various actors—not only the investors but also government officials, board members, civil servants in the municipalities, and intellectuals—shared the belief that land speculation was a driving force of the economy and urban development.¹⁰ Second, this article will show that the membership profiles of the OSA illustrate how broad the social base of the estate market was at that time, attracting investors from different classes and occupations. The OSA provided an opportunity for people from different backgrounds to unite their financial means so as to benefit from urban rent. Although the OSA was established as an Armenian association, it soon gained a cross-confessional character. Thus, economic benefits and ideas about land speculation formed a basis for cross-communal collaboration in late Ottoman Istanbul.

The article aims to contribute to the scholarship on collective housing schemes. The present literature mainly focuses on housing projects for workers in the late Ottoman and early republican periods; and housing for middle and upper-middle classes in the republican era through state-led housing schemes.¹¹ The case of the OSA demonstrates that many actors

10 Eda Güçlü, “Urban Tanzimât and Corrupting Property: Women as Petitioners of Honor in Nineteenth-Century Istanbul,” *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 15 (2017): 75–76; Ahmet Cevat [Emre], *İktisâta İnkılâp*, 90–91.

11 One of the earliest known of such project is the Mutual Benefit Building of British Lines which was established by the British in Istanbul in 1887. Unfortunately, not much is known about this project which was contemporary with the OSA. See Gül Neşe Doğusan-Alexander, “Bir Modernleşme Pratiği Olarak Kooperatifçilik ve Bahçeli Konut Yerleşimleri” (PhD diss., Istanbul Technical University, 2013), 21. For workers’ housing schemes, see Didem Yavuz “Crafting an Empire: The Hereke Factory Campus (1842–1914)” (PhD diss., New Jersey Institute of Technology and Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey – Newark, 2018), 75–86; Ali Cengizkan, ed., *Fabrika’da Barınmak: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi’nde Türkiye’de İşçi Konutları: Yaşam, Mekan ve Kent* (Ankara: Arkadaş Yayınları, 2009). For projects for middle and upper classes, see Lorans Tanatar Baruh, “İstanbul Emlâk Şirket-i Osmaniyesi’nin Yatırımları: Karaköy Borsa Hanı, Taksim Kışlası ve Talimhane,” *Toplumsal Tarih* 232 (April 2013): 30–35; İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Bahçeli Evlerin Öyküsü: Bir Batı Kurumunun Yeniden Yorumlanması* (Ankara: Batıkent, 1984); Gül Neşe Doğusan-Alexander, “Caught between Aspiration

50 from across classes and confessional groups undertook small scale infrastructural projects and/or expanded the borders of the city to form new neighborhoods according to their own social and economic goals and status in Istanbul.¹²

The land OSA purchased for its project had been endowed to the Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan Waqf. As a waqf property, in theory, the land in question could not be alienated; only certain rights over the land such as the proprietorship (*tasarruf*) could be granted in return for annual rents.¹³ However, the capitalistic urban expansion in the nineteenth century led to the alienation of many waqf properties and their integration into the land market, as the changing property regime led to the separation of the religious law ruling the waqf properties from the general property law.¹⁴ The land in question in this article represents the complexities of the waqf system as its proprietorship had passed down to the Saint James Monastery of Jerusalem, one of the highest religious authorities in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Armenian community of the Ottoman Empire, on the top of which was the Armenian patriarchate of Istanbul.¹⁵ The land involved approximately 2,300 *dönüm* (approx. 2.3 km²) in fragments, including a large estate and smaller farms. These land fragments were located along the land walls between Silivri Kapı and Yedikule in the east and stretched until Makriköy (Bakırköy) in the west; that is, covering the great parts of the contemporary Zeytinburnu. The monastery had the proprietorship rights through a yearly rent contract but not the ownership of the property. However, the monastery authorities tried to alienate the land from the waqf through its transfer to a third party, namely the OSA. By the early 1890s, the monastery had transferred 1,000 dönüm to the OSA upon which the project was supposed to take place (fig. 2, 3).

In addition to the documents from the Ottoman archives, this article draws on the OSA's own publications, especially its magazine, *Dndes*, published in Armenian. *Dndes* published articles on various popular topics of the time, such as economics, the scientific running of a household, health, and hygiene. Moreover, and more importantly for the purposes of this article, *Dndes* provides basic information about more than 500 members of the OSA, a list which was further expanded in later official reports. Such records show the occupational and confessional diversity of the members.

The membership patterns across the ethnic groups and occupations in OSA was similar to what Lorans Baruh convincingly showed in the case of the elite of Istanbul, who, despite their different ethnic and religious backgrounds, shared their interest in enjoying the benefits of urban rent.¹⁶ The history of the OSA further shows that this collaboration was not limited to the social and cultural milieu of the urban elite. This article argues that urban rent was the motivating force encouraging people from different walks of life to act together. There was a general agreement in the association's members that the project was beneficial to the city at large as it invested in land in its vicinity and would turn a waqf land into lucrative urban property. The article will further demonstrate that this shared understanding of creating

and Actuality," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 76, no. 3 (2017): 349–366. For social housing schemes in more recent periods, see Kivanç Kılınç and Mohammad Gharipour, eds., *Social Housing in the Middle East: Architecture, Urban Development, and Transnational Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019).

12 Egemen Yilgür, "Formation of Informal Settlements and the Development of the Idiom Teneke Mahalle in the Late-Ottoman Istanbul," *Journal of Urban History* 48, no. 3 (2022): 608–637. For an ethno-religious construction in Palestine, see Mark LeVine, "Land, Law and the Planning of Empire: Jaffa and Tel Aviv during the Late Ottoman and Mandate Periods," in *Constituting Modernity: Private Property in the East and the West*, ed. Huri İslamoğlu (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 111–112.

13 Bahaeddin Yediylidiz, "Müesseseler-Toplum Münasebetleri Çerçevesinde XVIII. Asır Türk Toplumuna ve Vakıf Müessesesi," *Vakıflar Dergisi* 15 (1982): 20–21.

14 Nada Moumtaz follows this development and the transformation of the waqf properties in urban Beirut from the Ottoman era to the contemporary period. Nada Moumtaz, *God's Property: Islam, Charity, and the Modern State* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

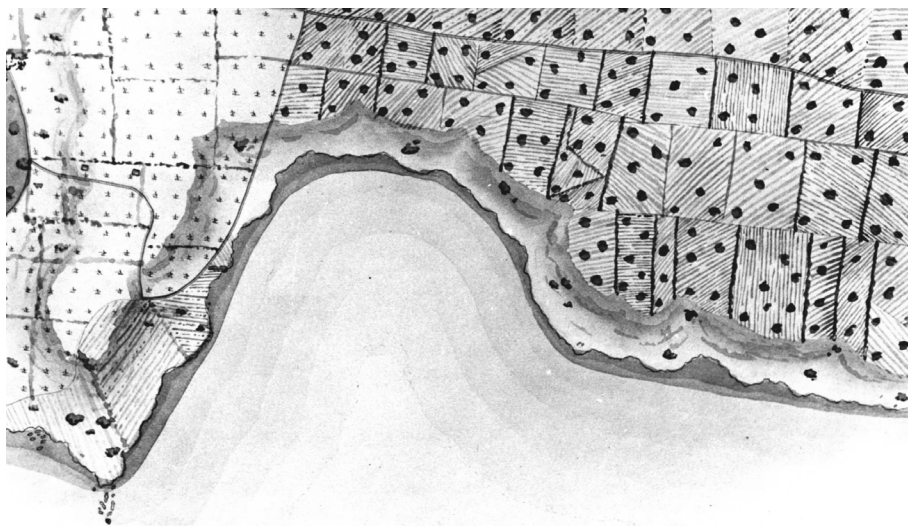
15 The patriarchate of Jerusalem was placed under the authority of the patriarchate of Istanbul in the mid-nineteenth century, as a part of the centralization of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Ottoman Empire in the context of Ottoman reforms. The management of the properties of the patriarchate of Jerusalem and its debt was an important aspect of that move. Richard E. Antaramian, *Brokers of Faith, Brokers of Empire: Armenians and the Politics of Reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 43–44.

16 Lorans İzabel Baruh, "The Transformation of the 'Modern' Axis of Nineteenth-Century Istanbul: Property, Investments and Elites from Taksim Square to Sirkeci Station" (PhD diss., Boğaziçi University, 2009); see also Ayhan Han, "İstanbul Ve Galata Hendeklerinde Kentsel Toprak Kullanımı," *Tarih Dergisi* 64, no. 2 (2016): 27–71.

Figure 2: The OSA project was supposed to take place in the region beyond the city walls in the Yedikule district. It was mainly an agricultural region with farms. *İstanbul Haritası: Haliç-Tophane, Haliç-Tersane, Saray-ı Hümayûn hududu, Kumkapı açığı*, 1847–1848, map, 78 x 81.5 cm, Mühendishane-i Humayun Collection, APLMUHIST001, Salt Research.



Figure 3: Detail of the OSB's area where individual farms are visible. *Mühendishane-i Hümayun. İstanbul. Şehir 1845 [Zeytinburnu-Veli Efendi]*, 1845, map, 63 x 59 cm, Edhem Eldem Collection, APLMUHIDTD1, Salt Research.



value out of agricultural land was shared across the Ottoman society, including Armenian entrepreneurs of the OSA, Muslim bureaucrats in the Ministry of Pious Foundations, members of the municipalities, the ecclesiastical figures of the Armenian church, Greek artisans, and Levantine professionals, as they all played different roles in transformation of the agricultural land of the Bezmiâlem Waqf into the housing project of the OSA.

In the last section, based on the investigation reports of the Ministry of Police, the article will show the limits to this prioritization of the urban rent over other historical dynamics, particularly the political context of the late Ottoman society. Armenians, in great numbers as they were in the OSA, were involved in a project alongside a substantial number of Muslim bureaucrats. This was seen as a potential security threat as the 1890s witnessed the criminalization of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, in the context of internationalization of the wretched conditions of Ottoman Armenians in the provinces and the rise of Armenian revolutionary organizations.¹⁷ This context led some security-minded bureaucrats to insist

¹⁷ For more on the security-minded policies of the Hamidian regime, see İlkey Yılmaz, *Serseri, Anarşist ve Fesadın*

on the abandonment of the project which they succeeded. Thus, from one angle, the OSA's demise turned into a rather a typical story of Ottoman state's discrimination of its Armenian subjects. However, the OSA case also allows us to view the same phenomenon from a different perspective. There were many Muslim Turks—mostly bureaucrats of the Hamidian state—and despite potential problems, they participated in an Armenian association voluntarily and willingly. Their quest for urban rent was one of their chief motivations.

Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutiwn: An “Ottoman” Housing Cooperative

The Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutiwn was established on March 21, 1886, by a group of Armenian entrepreneurs and intellectuals.¹⁸ The details and development of the project can be monitored through the pages of *Dndes*. The OSA saw the magazine as a tool to update its members about the developments related to the project and inform them about the association's administration. Similar to the saving associations around the globe at the time, *Dndes* propagated the merits of financial saving and investment in land.¹⁹ As stated in the first issue of *Dndes*:

Economy is divided into two branches, political economy and home economy, and the magazine will talk about both. As members of Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutiwn will have a home soon; they should be able to govern their home and home-economy according to the scientific methods. If someone does not know and apply these scientific methods in economics, health, etc. in their homes then there will be no order and happiness.²⁰

The OSA was an association based on the equity of its members. Lenders and borrowers were the same people. According to article 1 in the bylaws of the OSM, it was an “association of people who agreed to work together for their individual interests.” Its goals were to encourage its members to make savings (article 3), on the grounds that this would facilitate the conditions for them to own a dwelling or immovable property; to establish a shop where its members could buy high quality consumer goods at reasonable prices; to provide pensions and life insurance for its members; to provide marketplaces for its artisan members; to establish a pharmacy that would sell drugs at affordable prices; and to provide job opportunities to the children of its members (article 4). The OSA specified “land ownership” as its central goal. It would devote its energy primarily to buy (*iştirâ*) or contract (*mukavele rabt*) land to be then delivered to its members at low prices. To this end, the OSA had already acquired a large piece of land around Makriköy, the lands of Bezmiâlem Waqf, under contract to be transferred to its members (article 5). The founding members of the OSA had to pay 100 kuruş for registration (article 9), pay at least 10 kuruş each week to have the right to the land, and to work in the commissions and councils of the association (article 10). The association had a complex administrative structure, which depended on the active participation of its members.

The OSA had three types of members: founders, members with no right to vote, and honorary members. The founders were those who would pay the initial expenditures and carry out necessary steps for the purchase and sale of the land. The first and foremost among these initial steps involved surveying and mapping the purchased land. The cadastral surveys were necessary to integrate the land into the market by parceling it out, allocating space for streets and public spaces, and, accordingly, estimating its value for tax purposes.²¹ For that purpose, the founding members of the OSA had to pay an additional 200 kuruş

Peşinde: II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Güvenlik Politikaları Eksesinde Mürur Tezkereleri, Pasaportlar ve Otel Kayıtları (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2014).

¹⁸ *Ganonakir Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutyân* (Constantinople: K. Bağdadlıyan, 1877). For the Turkish version, see *Cemiyet-i Tasarruflıye-i Şarkîye'nin Nizamnamesidir* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i K. Bağdadlıyan-Aramyan, 1888). I use the Turkish version in this article.

¹⁹ Yates, *Selling Paris*, 70.

²⁰ “Arajin Khosk” [First words], *Dndes* 1 (October 1886): 3.

²¹ On parcelization and cadastral surveys in the nineteenth-century Istanbul, see Pierre Pinon, “The Parcelled City: Istanbul in the 19th Century,” in *Rethinking XIXth Century City*, ed. Attilio Petruccioli, Seminar Proceedings, series no. 1, vol. 2. (Cambridge: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1998), 45–64; Alp Yücel Kaya and Yücel Terzibaşoğlu, “Tahrir'den Kadastro'ya: 1874 İstanbul Emlak Tahriri ve Vergisi: 'Kadastro Tabir Olunur Tahrir-i Emlak',” *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 9 (2009): 9–58.

(article 13), which would grant them the right to control the association's councils and to receive their shares of the land before the other members (article 14).

The members without voting rights could not intervene in the running of the association but they could enjoy the other benefits of the association. They would pay at least 10 kuruş per week, same as the founders (article 16). Finally, honorary members would be those who assisted the association in different capacities (article 17). Women could be members and/or represent their husbands (article 21).

The financial equity between the OSA members was coupled with a bureaucratic structure, as seen in many savings associations.²² Full members were allowed to elect the members of the committees through voting. There were four committees: A general council consisting of 30 members made decisions (article 32–34) and audited the finances (article 43). The council of elders acted as the superintendent body of the association, checking the other councils, and examining membership applications (article 46). Arşag Agop Boyacıyan Efendi, the founder of the association, was a lifelong member of the council of elders (article 52). The third committee was an administrative council that would run the association. The plan was that it would consist of seven members. Its duties were the election and supervision of the executive committee, carrying out of the land purchases, and making decisions on the financial transactions above 10,000 kuruş (article 66). Finally, the executive committee would run the daily affairs of the association. It consisted of three members: the director, the secretary general, and the treasurer general of the association, all of whom would be elected by the Administrative Council (article 73).

These councils facilitated interaction between members from different ethnic backgrounds, discussed below. Equity among the members of different communities was in the founders' agenda from the start, as article 86 indicates that in the case of the OSA's dissolution, the money in its treasury would be distributed among the schools of each ethnoreligious community proportional to the members from each community.

The Land of the Project: A Waqf Property Alienated

The project of the OSA would take place on the lands of the waqf of Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan (d. 1853), the mother of Sultan Abdülmecid. The waqf included a hospital for the Muslim poor, fountains, and mosques. The assets supporting these institutions and public works were scattered over the vast geography of the empire.²³ One of these assets was Valide Çiftliği located beyond the Yedikule walls, a vast swath of agricultural land endowed to the hospital. This was where the OSA project would be located.²⁴

In 1846, Hagop Düzyan Efendi, the director of the Imperial Mint and a member of the Agricultural Council obtained permission for the Bezmiâlem Waqf to divide its lands around Makriköy and rent it to the applicants, both Muslim and non-Muslim, for the purposes of “planting trees, vineyards, orchards, gardens . . . and when necessary, constructing houses.”²⁵ This was a time in which waqf lands were increasingly alienated in urban areas. Such “vulgarization” of the waqf lands involved opening the land to the use of different actors under different legal forms and for various purposes, turning it into a commodity circulating in the market.²⁶ Many new settlements in late Ottoman Istanbul, both formal and informal, were formed on waqf lands.²⁷ Indeed, changes in the infrastructure and urban layout of the capital had direct impact on other properties of the Bezmiâlem Waqf.²⁸

22 Haveman and Rao, “Structuring a Theory of Moral Sentiments,” 1616–1617.

23 Kenan Göçer, “Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan ve Gureba Hastanesi Vakfı,” *Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 4, no. 1 (2014): 129. For the inventory of the assets of the hospital, see Göçer, “Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan,” 132, table 1.

24 “Aksam-ı mühimmesi gureba-i müslimin hastahanesi müştemilatından Valide Çiftliğine aid tarlalardan.” BOA, İ.DH. 1481–49 (17 Mayıs 1326 [May 30, 1910]).

25 BOA, İ.MVL. 74–1433 (21 Safer 1262 [February 18, 1846]).

26 Eda Güçlü, “Transformation of Waqf Property in the Nineteenth Century Ottoman Empire” (master's thesis, Sabancı University, 2009); Kaya and Terzibaşoğlu, “Tahrir'den Kadastro'ya,” 37–39.

27 Ali Şenyurt, “20. Yüzyıl Başlarında Feriköy'deki Vakıf Arazilerinin Dönüştürülmesi,” *Mimarlık ve Yaşam Dergisi* 2, no. 1 (2017): 153–163; Yülgür, “Formation of Informal Settlements,” 614–615.

28 K. Mehmet Kentel, “Nature's 'Cosmopolis': Villagers, Engineers and Animals along Terkos Waterworks in Late

By the time that the OSA launched its project, the Valide Çiftliği was administered by the Saint James Monastery of Jerusalem. Acting on behalf of the monastery, the Armenian patriarchate of Istanbul applied to the Şura-yı Devlet (Council of the State) in 1887 to obtain imperial permission for the transfer of the lands to the OSA. The patriarchate documented that the land under question had been given to Karabet Kalfa, the imperial architect who built the hospital of Bezmiâlem Waqf, for a yearly fee of 20,000 kuruş. After his death, the land passed to (*intikal*) his children by inheritance, and from them to the Saint James Monastery of Jerusalem by transfer in 1877.²⁹ The monastery continued to pay the yearly rent of 20,000 kuruş to the Bezmiâlem Waqf for a decade. Shortly before the patriarchate's application in 1887, between 1884 and 1886, several pious foundations' properties had been put up for auction, which facilitated the transformation of the urban layout throughout the imperial capital.³⁰ These transfers transformed their nature as waqf properties in the land market.

In 1887, the association published its plan to transform the lands of the Bezmiâlem Waqf into a housing compound.³¹ The land under contract was described as a *çiftlik* (estate) between Yedikule and Makriköy. The land covered 2,000 dönüm in thirty farms. The OSA and the Saint James Monastery agreed that the land to be transferred to the association would be no less than 1,000 dönüm in total; that it would be divided into plots; and that each dönüm would be sold for 1,000 kuruş to the founding members. The settlement would be called Hamidiye, named after the sultan (article 1). The land would be divided into plots within a year after the contract was signed. If, after surveying, the land turned out to be less than 1,000 dönüm, the difference would be compensated proportionally from the farm on the seaside, another property of the waqf, which was 50 dönüm (article 2).³²

The land of each shareholder was also subject to certain regulations and necessitated detailed calculations. The streets and other public spaces of the residential neighborhood were calculated to comprise 25 percent of the land; this meant that each OSA member would receive 25 percent less land than what they had paid for (article 6). A special commission would categorize the land as high, middle, and low quality, and give each shareholder his/her due share according to the proportions of each category in the total amount of land (article 7). Each shareholder would receive his/her plot by drawing lots (article 8).

The association put some limits on the shareholders' use and sale of their individual plots. Only half of the allocated land could be used for constructing a house. The other half would be sold to a third party, which could only be a new member (a "member with no-right-to-vote"). One third of the revenue from that sale would be used towards compensating the founding members for their expenses while they construct their houses. Another third would be allocated for the construction of public works and common buildings. The last third would be paid to the owners of the plot in question (article 9).

The association would build a park, public baths, sea baths (wooden cabins on the sea), a bakery, a public fountain, a fire pump, and a fire pool. Some of these facilities were meant to provide income to the association (article 12). Schools and houses of worship would also be built on the common land. For this purpose, each confessional community with fifty members would receive 1,000 *zira* and those with one hundred members or more would receive 2,000 *zira* of land (article 13). All these properties would be registered under the name of the association (article 14).

Nineteenth Century Istanbul," in *The Seeds of Power: Explorations in the Environmental History of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Onur Inal and Yavuz Köse (Winwick: White Horse Press, 2019), 168.

29 "Pederleri Karabetden müntakilen oğulları Serkiz ve Andon ve Kirkor ve simon ile Safvik ve Safvet'in ferağlarından Kudüs-i Şerif manastırı rahiplerinden Ağop veled-i Zayniya namına 7 Receb 94 tarihıyla vakıf senedâtı ita kılındığı mestur ve mukaydır." BOA, ŞD. 632-17, app. 2 (11 Nisan 1303 [April 23, 1888]).

30 Tanatar Baruh, "The Transformation of the 'Modern' Axis," 138-140.

31 *Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutiwn Ganonakrutiwn Himnadir Andamots Hoğerun Veraberyal* (Constantinople: K. Bağdadlıyan, 1877). For the Turkish version, see *Cemiyet-i Tasarrufiye-i Şarkiyeye'nin Müesses Hissedarları Arazisine Dair Kararnamedir* (Istanbul: Matbaa-ı Bağdadlıyan-Aramyan, 1887). The Turkish version was used for this article.

32 For instance if the land purchased from estate was 800 instead 1,000 dönüm, then 40 dönüm of the farm from the seaside would be purchased as the land in the seaside is more valuable.

Soon after its foundation, the OSA expanded its membership both in terms of number and scope and began to materialize its goals. The first and most important step was the preparation of the cadastral map which would open the land up for market transactions. As the authority over the Monastery of Saint James, the Armenian patriarchate of Istanbul would also benefit from the transfer of land to the OSA, and therefore it was also involved in the cadastral survey. The patriarchate negotiated with the municipality for the reduction of the fee required for the map and the postponement of its payment. Its demands were received favorably by the municipality as the project would serve a greater good, namely increasing the value of the land.³³

Other government offices also had to grant their authorization for the OSA to initiate the project. The process of authorization for opening land up for settlement had already been standardized by the 1880s.³⁴ The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Police were contacted as there would be a school and a police station in the new neighborhoods. Both ministries replied that they needed to see the specific places devoted to these buildings on the district map.³⁵ Likewise, as the area was close to the shore and the city walls, permission from the Seraskerlik (Ministry of War) was required. The ministry granted the permission on the condition that only shops and houses, and no factories would be built in the settlement as the latter could not be protected in case of a military threat.³⁶ The Engineering Department of the municipality also granted its permission when it was asked about the water infrastructure of the area.³⁷ And finally, when its permission was requested, the Evkaf Nezareti (Ministry of Pious Foundations) did not oppose the project. However, it asked for amendments in the initial contract which it had with the Saint James Monastery, as the ministry expected the value of the land to increase substantially through this project, too.³⁸ This expectation that the value of the land would increase due to the project was shared and voiced by different actors, both state and non-state, which facilitated the transfer of the land to the OSA and the initiation of the housing project. Only the approval of the sultan was needed at that point in late 1888.³⁹

As a result of these developments, the project moved further along. By the summer of 1887, the OSA had already purchased 264,000 *zira* of land, had paid the 30 percent of 240,000 *zira*, and 12.5 percent of 400,000 *zira* of land.⁴⁰ By the summer of 1888, the association's possession had reached the following: 464,000 *zira* was fully paid for and 560,000 *zira* of land was partially paid off. The members had paid 250 shares (each share was 1,600 *zira*) for these lands.⁴¹ The transfer of the lands to the OSA was thus continuing as planned.

While the OSA presented itself primarily as a savings association with the goal of enabling its members to acquire land and houses,⁴² its goals could only be materialized through creating urban rent. This took place quickly: the second group of shares of the OSA would be sold at a price higher than the first shares.⁴³ Moreover, the land which would be separated from each share and sold separately to third parties (article 14) would not be sold for less than 5 kuruş per *zira*. This would mean the land value increased by three times within the time that it took to purchase the land and construct a house on it. The transfer of land to third parties would have to take place in ways that the initial investors would regain the

33 "Keyfiyet rahib-i merkumun vekiline lede'l tebliğ zikr olunan harcın defeaten tesviyesine muktedir olamayacağına ve zaten teşebbüsât-ı vaktiadan maksad oranın kesb-i şeref ve memuriyet eylemesi kaziyesi olmasına mebni haritanın tanzim ve muâmelat-ı lazîminin ikmâli ile irâde-i seniye şerefsüdüünde iktizâ eden harc için teminât vermek üzere mühendis mesârifine medar olmak için şimdilik altmış lira ita edebileceğini ifade eylediğinden ve bu ise muvaffak-i hal ve maslahat görüldüğünden bahisle ber mucib-i nizam icâb eden harca mahsuben mesârif-i vaktiânın peşin olarak istifâsi ve kusuru için dahi teminât ahzı ile haritanın tanzimine mübâşeret olunması istizânına dair şehri-emanet-i celîlesinden." BOA, ŞD. 2536-26, app. 3 (23 Temmuz 1304 [August 4, 1888]).

34 BOA, ŞD. 753-7.

35 Ibid., app. 2, app. 12 (9 Teşrinisani 1304 [November 21, 1888]).

36 Ibid., app. 4 (18 Kanunusani 1304 [January 30, 1888]).

37 Ibid., app. 6 (16 Mart 1305 [March 28, 1889]).

38 BOA, ŞD. 632-17, app. 30 (9 Kanunusani 1308 [January 21, 1893]).

39 Ibid., app. 7 (9 Teşrinisani 1304 [November 21, 1888]).

40 "Pağtadudıwn me," 260.

41 "Hoğëru Arjekn i Dackastan" [Land Prices in Turkey], *Dndes* 2, no. 10-11 (July-August 1887): 164.

42 *Dndes* 4 (January 1887): 77.

43 Ibid.

56 amount they had invested and earn some additional compensation toward the expenses of constructing their houses. The lending and borrowing system could be summarized as follows (chart 1):

Stage 1: Initial sale to an OSA founding member	Stage 2: Sale to a new OSA member	Stage 3: Details of allocation of payments
1600 <i>zira</i> (1 dönüm) sold to a founding member for 1,000 kuruş	The remaining 600 <i>zira</i> to be sold to a new OSA member (member with no right to vote)	1/3 of 600 → 200 <i>zira</i> x 5 kuruş: 1,000 kuruş for the expenses of constructing houses
25 percent of the land (400 <i>zira</i>) to be used for public spaces like streets		1/3 of 600 → 200 <i>zira</i> x 5 kuruş: 1,000 kuruş for the public works
of the remaining 1200 <i>zira</i> , 600 <i>zira</i> were to be used by the "owner"		1/3 of 600 → 200 <i>zira</i> x 5 kuruş: 1,000 to be paid to the initial owner of the entire plot (founding member of the OSA)
the cost of each <i>zira</i> of land: 0.625 kuruş		each <i>zira</i> is 5 kuruş the founding member gains back his/her initial investment of 1,000 kuruş and also compensation for the construction expenses

Chart 1: Summary of the lending and borrowing system of the OSA.

The repayment of the invested amount was expected owing to an immediate increase in land prices. Indeed, the prices were soon considered to be too low again. By March 1887, at the time of the OSA's first annual meeting, the first 500 shares had already been already sold. Tigran Efendi Der Nersessyan, the general inspector of the association, requested that the second 500 shares should be open to sale, but at the price of 1,200 kuruş in place of the initial price of 1,000 kuruş per dönüm.⁴⁴ A year later their price was increased to 1,400 kuruş per dönüm.⁴⁵

The value of land increased by 20 percent within a year of OSA's establishment and 40 percent two years after, in a period when the annual rate of price increase is calculated to be less than 1 percent.⁴⁶ The more the value of the land increased, the greater the discrepancy became between the income of the OSA and the yearly rent, 20,000 kuruş, to be paid by the proprietor to Bezmiâlem Waqf. The last list of payments by members of the OSA published in *Dndes* attests to this discrepancy and shows the attractiveness of the land. In a period of six weeks in the summer of 1888, 523 members paid 29,800 kuruş for their shares.⁴⁷ Thus, the yearly rent paid to the waqf by the OSA was generated in a period of one month by the members of the association.

This discrepancy did not go unnoticed by the bureaucrats. In their investigation of the association in early 1892, the security authorities highlighted the growing wealth of the OSA and the monastery through this form of urban rent:

The land between Yedikule and Makrikoy would not worth 2,000–3,000 lira but due to this enterprise by Armenians, the Armenian Monastery of Jerusalem, under whose name this land is [registered], is benefiting 18,000–19,000 Liras and the value of the land is increasing moment by moment, and since 400 shares have not been sold but preserved, the value of the land would increase more and the profit of the monastery will reach 25,000–30,000 liras; the benefit of the association would increase likewise.⁴⁸

44 *Dndes* 7 (April 1887): 131.

45 *Dndes* 2, no. 10–11 (July–August 1887): 146.

46 Şevket Pamuk, "Prices in the Ottoman Empire, 1469–1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36 (2004): 468.

47 *Dndes* 2, 10–11 (July–August 1887): 176.

48 "Makri karyesiyle Yedikule arasındaki arazi iki üç bin kira bile değmez iken Ermenilerin bu teşebbüleri sebebiyle Kudüs-i şerif Ermeni manastırı namına olan arazi-i mezkure bedeli olmak üzere mezkur manastır şimdiki halde on sekiz on dokuz bin lira istifade etmekte ve arazinin kıymetini an be an tezâyüd ettiği ve sahib-i arazi nâmına dört yüz hisse elyevm satılmayub muhâfaza edildigi cihetlerle bu yüzden mezkur arazinin kıymeti bi't tezâyüd Ermeni manastırının istifadesi de birkaç seneye kadar yirmi beş otuz bin liraya varacağı derkar bulunmakta olduğu ve cemiyetin istifadesi de bu nisbetde tezâyüd ederek." BOA, Y. MTV. 58–12 (25 Kanunuevvel 1307 [January 6, 1892]).

Before it caught the hostile attention of the security-minded state officials in the 1890s, such a lucrative investment attracted many investors, cutting across ethnic and religious communities, and social standings based on class and status.

Member Profiles

As we have seen, the OSA promised handsome profits to its members. *Dndes* once stated, “Maybe in 10 years half of Turkey’s [sic] population will be its [the association’s] members and it will enjoy the sublime protection of Sultan Abdülhamid II.”⁴⁹ Many could have been motivated by such slogans about the future of the association. However, material benefits—namely, urban rent—was more real and more immediate.

The rosters of OSA members published in *Dndes* included their names, professions, and places of residency if they were not based in Istanbul. These lists had different purposes: they publicized its members officially, used the social capital of some of the prominent members, and aimed to provide assurance to the future members by showing the diversity of the members in terms of confessional background, class, and status in the imperial society. Moreover, the magazine provided regular updates of the membership rosters which showed a steady increase in the number of members. Such emphasis on the expansion of the membership base should have provided a further assurance to the potential members about the future of the association.

The number of OSA members reached 566 in the summer of 1888.⁵⁰ While the majority were Armenian, the number of members from different communities was growing. There was also a considerable number of women from across different communities. In addition to a small number of Jews and Levantines, there were Protestant and Catholic Armenians within this diverse body.⁵¹ By the summer of 1888, when the last issue of *Dndes* was published, most non-Armenian members were Greeks and Muslim Turks, thirty-eight and thirty-seven members, respectively. Both the number of members and the proportion of non-Armenians continued to increase in the following years. In late 1891, a report of the Ministry of Police put the number of shares around 1,200 and provided a detailed list of 104 Muslims who held a share of the land sold by the OSA.

This ethnically and religiously diverse body also showed great multiplicity in terms of the occupation of its members. *Dndes* provided a list of the occupational distribution of the OSA members in the summer of 1888, shown in the following table:

The list is interesting in various ways. First, it shows one of the ways in which women participated in the land market in late Ottoman Istanbul. In terms of the division between sexes, the list shows that about 8 percent of the members (46 of 523) were women. These included both married and unmarried women. As the membership lists show, some of these women became members with their husbands or brothers.⁵² The investigation report by the police shows that there were also Muslim women among the OSA members.⁵³ There were many unmarried women from all ethnoreligious groups. Indeed, these cases show that a wealthy household saw the OSA as a means to secure dowry or financial security for the unmarried women.⁵⁴ It should also be stated that there was at least one unmarried woman, Jüstin Boyacıyan, who worked as a teacher.

49 “Engerutiwn kağakagan dndesutyun,” 103.

50 The list I compiled based on the rosters adds up to 566, however the number of members paying fees was 523. This might be a result of some members leaving in later periods or simply not pay their weekly contribution.

51 For instance, the list included two agents of the Protestant Bible House, Minas Kevorkyan and Krikor Şahbazyan. The rosters included many Catholic members, too.

52 For instance, Arşakyan Yerahuni and Hayk; Kasparyan Mahdesi Arus and Karabet.

53 For instance, Fahime Hanım, wife of an Ahmet Efendi; Behiye hanım, wife of a Süleyman Efendi. BOA, Y.MTV. 56–69, app. 3 (10 Teşrin-i Sani 1307 [November 22, 1891]).

54 Lakvan and Jan Klara, and Fatma, Hafza, Aişe all from the household of a Rauf Efendi, to name a few.

Archbishop/bishop	5
Vardapet	1
Priest	6
Married women	35
Unmarried women	11
State official	48
Merchant	43
Secretary (at a commercial house)	23
Architect	6
Engineer	9
Physician	12
Pharmacist	7
Jeweler	12
Yazma maker	11
Official (at a commercial house)	12
Official (Ottoman Imperial Bank)	12
Official (Regie, Railway, Terkos Waterways, etc.)	14
Lawyer	8
Teacher	7

Editor	5
Owner of a printing house	5
Bookstore owner	5
Secretary	10
Commissioner	8
Sirmakeş	5
Manifaturacı	7
Coffeeshop owner	7
Timber merchant	6
Tailor	7
Hazırcı	7
Tuhafçı	6
Senakapedk	6
Leather merchant	6
Shoe merchant	6
Fesci	5
Translator	5
Silk merchant	5
Other trades and occupations	1-4

The OSA members also included Armenian ecclesiastical figures of very high standing such as the Apostolic patriarch of Istanbul, Khoren Ashikyan, the Apostolic patriarch of Jerusalem, Harutyun Vehabedian, the deputy-patriarch of Akhdamar-Van, and the abbot of the Armash Monastery. Their participation is quite interesting as these men were celibate with no heirs. Article 18 of the imperial edict, dated to 1875, on the duties and rights of the Armenian ecclesiastical figures, allowed members of the church to donate their properties to the use of the community (such as charity and community institutions) and to the patriarchate of Istanbul.⁵⁵ Thus, the ecclesiastical figures' participation in the project seems to be both about endorsing the project, which had links to the Armenian Apostolic religious institutions, and about investing for the community. It is also important to note that these ecclesiastical figures resided outside Istanbul and usually kept their positions until their death, which supports the view that the investment for the community might have been an important reason in participating in the project.

The occupational distribution of the members shows the participation of professionals and artisans, in addition to further divisions within each group. The strong interest of the upper-middle classes in the project is evident by the presence of secretaries at commercial houses, professionals like lawyers, physicians, and pharmacists, and officials in foreign firms. Newspaper editors were also counted as being from the upper strata of society due to their social and cultural capital. Arşag Boyacıyan, the founder of the OSA, was a leading publisher at the time.⁵⁶ Likewise Karapet Ütücüyan of *Masis* and Misailides Evangelinos of *Anatoli* were among the most prominent intellectuals of the Armenian and Greek communities, respectively (Evangelinos was a Turkish-speaking Karamanlı Greek). However, despite the presence of many upper-middle-class members, the majority of the OSA members were of more modest means, mostly artisans and shopkeepers. We do not know whether these people saw the project as a lucrative future investment or a means to acquire a suburban house to live in during their retirement. In addition to these financial

Table 1: The occupational distribution the OSA members as recorded in 1888 ("Vijagakrutiwn" [Statistics], *Dndes* 1011 [July–August 1888]: 164–165).

55 Arşak A. Alpoyacıyan, "Azgayin Sahmanadrutiwne: Ir Tsagume yew kirarutiwne," in *Endartsak Oratsuits S. Prkçyan Hivandanotsi Hayots* (Constantinople: H. Matteosyan, 1910), 96–97. I thank Dzovinar Derderian for bringing this article of the edict to my attention.

56 Laurent Mignon, "Boyacıyan, Arşag Agop," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Devin J. Stewart, https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_24354.

motivations, one may also infer that the railway connection between the OSA's land and the markets in the old town specifically attracted these artisans and shopkeepers, which *Dndes* repeatedly underlined.⁵⁷

The government employees deserve special attention as they form the largest occupational group among the members of the OSA according to the association's own classification of its members. They were mostly Muslim Turks, thus they formed crucial informal links between the project and the various state institutions. Alongside middle-rank bureaucrats, there were many high-ranking officials among the members of the OSA such as the directors of state factories.⁵⁸

Among the top-ranking bureaucrats, those of the Ministry of Pious Foundations are particularly notable due to the status of the OSA's land as a waqf property. These bureaucrats included Rakım Bey, the Director of Records of the Ministry of Pious Foundations, and Ali Faik Bey, a member of the executive board of the same ministry as well as the scribe of Adile Sultan, sister of Sultan Abdülmecid. These figures were probably very useful for the OSA in its relations with the Ministry of Pious Foundations. *Dndes* underlined such connections in its promotional pieces. For the magazine, criticizing the OSA would mean questioning the high-ranking state officials who acted—with no questioning—in the interest of the state. It once wrote that “these lands belonged to the Bezmiâlem Valide Sultan Waqf; [this means that] the minister of Pious Foundations who is also the superintendent of the charitable deeds of the [imperial] dynasty, is also in charge of the administration of our lands.”⁵⁹ *Dndes* made it clear that criticizing the OSA would automatically mean an allegation of corruption of the bureaucrats who were also members of the association. That Ali Faik Bey alongside the famous architect Aznavur Hovsep Efendi received the highest number of votes during the elections of the General Council of the OSA is a clear indication that the majority of the members believed that such relations were crucial for the success of the project.⁶⁰

The OSA also had close relations with other public authorities, particularly the district and metropolitan municipalities. The extra mural project was under the jurisdiction of the subgovernorate of Çatalca. In 1891, there was an attempt to register the land as part of metropolitan Istanbul, under the jurisdiction of the Third Municipal District (Üçüncü Daire-i Belediye)—that is, Samatya Municipality.⁶¹ This would be beneficial to both parties, as the municipality would bring services and increase the value of the land, and in return it would collect taxes from the residents. Interestingly, Tahir Efendizade Ali Saffet Bey, the director of the Third Municipal District, was an OSA member since 1888. Moreover, following Ali Saffet Bey's membership, six employees of the same municipality joined the OSA the same year.⁶²

One wonders whether the encouragement of one's peers in the workplace and personal connections in general played a role in attracting certain members into the project. That there were among the OSA members a total of five makers of *canfe*, precious cloth made of silk, who all belonged to the Rum community, prompts one to think this was probably a case of peer influence.⁶³ Relations among civil servants in the modern state institutions seem to be equally consequential. One curious example involves the employees of the Telegraph Administration (Telgraf İdaresi). In addition to two early members of the telegraph office, one Armenian and

57 “[The district] is close to Galata and the market by train.” *Dndes* 6 (March 1887): 109. *Dndes* 2, no. 10–11 (July–August 1887): 176. “Almost 26 minutes from Sirkeci, 16 from Kumkapu and 2–3 minutes from Yedi Kule.” *Yeramyay Değegakir Arevelyan Dndesagan Miutyun* (Constantinople, K. Bağdadlyan, 1889), 5.

58 Mehmet Raif Efendi, Director of the Feshane Factory (Feshane-i Amire) and Nuri Paşa commander of the Imperial Stables (Istaba-yı Amire).

59 *Dndes* 9 (June 1887): 212.

60 Ali Faik Bey, alongside Aznavur Hovsep Efendi, received 206 votes in the general meeting of the OSA in March 1888, and became member of the General Council of the association.

61 BOA, DH.MKT. 1861–55 (5 Ağustos 1307 [August 17, 1891]).

62 Mehmet Emin Efendi (engineer), Mehmet Memduh Efendi (scribe), Mehmet Besim Efendi (accountant), İbrahim Cemal Efendi (accountant), Edhem İbrahim Efendi (engineer), Süleyman Resmi Efendi (engineer, surveillance, and estimation, *keşif memuru*).

63 Athahasides Mikhal Efendi, Teodoridi Aleksandır Efendi, Makri Telemek Efendi, Mumcuoğlu Jan Efendi, Kararı Rerikli Efendi, and Konstantes Aleksandır Efendi.

60 one Muslim Turk, there are several employees from the same office that participated in the OSA later on. In the list of new members provided in *Dndes* in March 1887, there were three clerks from the office of the Telegraph Administration, two Armenians and a Greek; and in May 1887, three other officials from the same office became members, two Armenians and a Muslim. The Greek telegraph officer was Antonidis Jan Efendi, the director of the Telegraph Administration, and the Muslim Turkish member was Fahri Bey, the vice-director of the same office. These were followed by Ahmet Raif Efendi, the director of the Telegraph Workshop. Similarly, the dubious involvement of the bureaucrats of the Ministry of Pious Foundations provides further examples of the role of personal interaction in the involvement in the project. Alongside the top bureaucrats of the ministry mentioned above, there were other OSA members from the same ministry. One of them was Hacı Ali Bey, who was the Varidat Mümeyyizi, the auditor of the accounts at the ministry. Furthermore, a note in the list of investigation of the Ministry of Police indicates that Hacı Ali Bey made a certain Mustafa Efendi register for the OSA.⁶⁴ These cases hint at the crucial role of personal interactions between people from the same trade or office in involving them in urban land speculation. As the case of telegraph workers shows, this interaction could cut across communal ties.⁶⁵

The OSA had members from outside Istanbul, as well. In addition to the Armenian ecclesiastical figures, there were at least fifteen investors from the provinces, two of whom were women. Seven of these non-Istanbulite members were from Izmit, a city near Istanbul, and connected via railroad. There were two members each from Bardizak (Bahçecik) and Bandırma, all merchants, whose networks probably linked them to Istanbul. Membership from more distant provinces was rare: one woman from Varna, one merchant from Izmir, and one telegraph officer from Samsun. Vehbi Efendizade Sami Efendi, the only Muslim member of the association from the provinces, was the former chief judge at the criminal court at Gümülcine (Komotini).

Non-Armenians gradually began to have more prominence in the OSA, a development which did not go unnoticed. For instance, a commentator in *Dndes* ironically appreciated the efforts of Greek and Turkish members in electing people from their own communities whereas Armenian members assisted them “with their impartiality.”⁶⁶ Such comments underlined the increasing power of Muslims in the association, which made some Armenian members uneasy. The Ministry of Police report in 1891 shows that there were seven Turks, mostly bureaucrats, in the General Council of the OSA made up of forty members.⁶⁷ Within a period of five years, the OSA had progressed towards its goal of expanding its membership, particularly among non-Armenians, and thus turned into a truly Ottoman Association. Urban rent was the driving force behind this civic unity, in addition to the hopes for protection through diverse networks of the members.

Limits to Capitalistic Urban Development: Security Concerns

The project was put to a halt before construction began due to the growing security concerns of the sultan and Ottoman bureaucracy. It was the early 1890s when criminalization of Armenian subjects was gaining pace. The OSA with over 1,000 members, including many Armenians in its roster, was alarming. This was a period in which Armenian subjects of the empire began to face hard times as the future of the Ottoman Empire, known as the Armenian Question, had turned into a diplomatic problem. Various Armenian groups including revolutionary parties had become important actors, often facing violent reaction from the state authorities. Relations between the government, Muslim, and Armenian subjects deteriorated further in the mid-1890s when widespread anti-Armenian violence shook the empire in the east and the imperial capital.

64 “Mustafa Efendi mahdumu Cemil Bey: Evkafda Varidat-ı Mümeyyizi Hacı Ali Bey yazdırmıştır.” BOA, Y.MTV. 56–69, app. 3 (10 Teşrinisani 1307 [November 22, 1891]).

65 Abdulhamit Kırmızı, “Colleagues of Empire: Intercommunal Collegiality in Late Ottoman Bureaucracy” (lecture, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, November 24, 2021).

66 *Dndes* 2, no. 10–11 (July–August 1887): 146.

67 “Bu meclisde bulunan İslam azaları bunlardır: İstanbul Reji Nazırı Ahmed Tevfik Bey, Tophane-i Amire-i Tecrübe Meclis azasından İsmail Hakkı Paşa, Evkafda muhayyer Hacı Ali Bey, Mahmud Bey matbası müdürü Camczade Mazhar Bey, Reji müfettişlerinden Mahmud Nedim Bey, Şehremaneti Mühendislerinden Küçük Ali Bey, Liman İdâresi ketebesinden Mahmed Sabri Bey.” BOA, Y.MTV. 56–69, app. 3 (10 Teşrinisani 1307 [November 22, 1891]).

While the OSA was waiting for the sultan's final approval to launch its project, the Ministry of Police ran an extensive investigation into the association in 1891. This was interesting as the permissions from the state offices, including the Ministry of the Police, to transform the waqf land into a residential area had been granted a few years earlier. However, political circumstances in the empire put the OSA under the spotlight. The officials did not have to work hard to find a soft spot of the OSA, however. The association, despite its ongoing dialogue with various state departments and bureaucrats among its ranks, had not applied to the Ministry of Police to be registered as an organization. That gave the ministry a strong pretext to move against the OSA.

The investigation report shows the lack of a clear policy in the minds of authorities in cases related to economic investments, in general, and urban development, in particular. Yet it is clear that security concerns prevailed over economic development. "Even though the state should support such urban development projects," wrote the investigation report, "the police holds itself responsible for searching for potential bad intentions and results even in such [beneficial] projects."⁶⁸ In the political atmosphere of the 1890s, it was not difficult to find reasons to feed such suspicions as the majority of the OSA's members were Armenians. Moreover, the complex administrative structure of the association with various elected administrative councils only raised more suspicions in the minds of the state officials. Thus, the investigation report stated that although the OSA did not seem to have any mischievous goals against the imperial state, the investigators could not be sure whether the association would not have such goals in the future.⁶⁹ Moreover, in order to strengthen their position, the investigators argued that although the OSA's purpose seemed to be only about establishing a settlement in the proposed project, it would probably not stop there. They highlighted that, according to its regulations, the association could spend half of its treasury in a place of its choice.⁷⁰ Thus the urban rent-based economic power of the OSA was also connected to the issue of security. The association had collected 1,116,000 kuruş by the time of the investigation. As already indicated, the land that the OSA invested in was gaining value, which the Ministry of the Police underlined as potentially detrimental both to the financial and security-related interests of the state.

If there was one thing that worried the Ministry of the Police more than a prosperous and an Armenian-majority association, it was the Muslims among its ranks. The investigation report meticulously listed the Muslim members, about one hundred of them, providing details such as family relations or noting down through whose instigations they became members of the OSA. At this point in 1891, there were many more high-ranking bureaucrats than five years earlier when the association was first established. Yet, it is not clear whether the bigger problem for the Ministry of Police was Muslims in a potentially "hazardous" Armenian association or that the involvement of high-ranking bureaucrats made certain official procedures easier for the OSA. In his report, the minister rhetorically asked, "How come such a massive company was established on its own while even the smallest companies and associations receive permission only after extensive investigations and various difficulties."⁷¹ This was a tacit recognition of bureaucratic failure; an "Armenian" association with more than 1,000 members and a treasury over one million kuruş having gone without notice was hard to believe considering the security-minded policies of the sultan. Many Muslim bureaucrats became part of this

68 BOA, Y.MTV. 56–69, app. 3 (10 Teşrinisani 1307 [November 22, 1891]).

69 Ibid.

70 "Ve külliyyetli akçe cem ve meclis-i umumi ve ihtiyâr ve idâre meclisleri namlarıyla bir takım meclisler teşkil etmesi ve cemiyet-i mezkûreye kısımlı küllisi Ermeni ve bir kısmı İslam ve Rum ahâlisinden olmak üzere dokuz yüz doksan yedi kişinin iştirâk eylemesi ve cemiyetce şimdîye kadar toplanılan akçenin miktarı bir milyon yüz on altı bin guruşa baliğ olub sekiz yüz otuz üç guruş daha matlûbu bulunduğû ve cemiyetin maksadı suret-i zahirede Makri karyesiyle Yedikule beynindeki araziye karye haline koymaktan ibaret gibi görünüyör ise de nizamname ve kararname meallerine nazaren bu teşebbüsün yalnız karye teşkiline münhasır olmayarak karyenin teşkilinden sonra dahi devam edeceğî ve temettuatını fevkalade tezeyyüd etmiş olacağı cihetlerle beraber temettuatından yüzde elli mikdarının cemiyet kararıyla istenilen mahale sarf edilebileceğine dair nizamnamede münderic madde-i mahsusa dahi fevkalade calib-i nazar-ı dikkat bulunduğû ve." BOA, Y.MTV. 58–12, app. 3 (23 Kanunuevvel 1307 [January 4, 1892]).

71 "Bu hal bütün bütün nazar-ı hayret-i çakeranemi davet eylemiş olub en küçük bir şirket ve cemiyet için uzun uzadı tahkikat icrâsiyla ve bin türlü müşkilât ile ruhsat verilmekte iken böyle bir cemiyet-i aziminin hod be hod teşekkül ve bi'l istizân nizamnameler ve kararnameler neşri husûslarından iğmâz edilmiş olması esbâbının tayin ve idrakında çakerleri aciz kaldığım gibi." BOA, Y. MTV. 56–69, app. 2 (11 Teşrinisani 1307 [November 23, 1891]).

62 unauthorized “Armenian” association willingly, despite the potential backlash in the growing anti-Armenian sentiments and the gloomy political atmosphere of the 1890s.

As a result of the investigation, the activities of the association were suspended. However, it did not result in the prosecution of the OSA founders, probably due to the standing of some members in imperial society. Alongside the high-ranking Muslim officials, for instance, Arshag Boyacıyan, who was the founder of the association, had managed the Imperial Press in the 1860s. Likewise, Dikran Der Nersessyan, who was chief secretary of the OSA, was a son of Khachatur Der Nersessyan, a deputy during the First Constitutional period. Dikran Der Nersessyan held a high-ranking office in the Municipality of Istanbul and then became the lay representative of the Armenian patriarchate at the Sublime Porte.⁷² Thus, some Armenians in charge of the OSA were well-connected with the imperial establishments and enjoyed great social capital.

It was probably because of these dynamics that the government chose to draw out the issue in the bureaucratic procedures rather than immediately closing the association down. This bureaucratic dragging gained a strong legal backing as the priest who acted as the proprietor of the land in the name of the Saint James Monastery—the monasteries did not have legal personalities until 1913—passed away in the early 1890s, naturally with no heir. Thus, the contract between the monastery and the Ministry of Pious Foundations was considered void. The land returned to the control of the ministry, which rented it out to various parties in later decades. The OSA was reestablished after the 1908 Revolution but there is no indication that it had a strong presence.⁷³ The Armenian ecclesiastical authorities continued their attempts to regain the control of the land in that period, particularly after the 1913 law on civic status of institutions, until World War I. Following the end of the empire, the land was left in a status of legal ambiguity similar to many properties that Christian communities claimed as their own.⁷⁴ As a result, the land of the OSA project, where the first collective housing projects in Istanbul would have taken place, turned into one of the first shanty towns of Istanbul in the following decades; contemporary Zeytinburnu rose on the lands of the failed project of the OSA.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The Arewelyan Dndesagan Miutiwn was one of the first examples of a savings association seeking to purchase land for a collective housing project in the Ottoman Empire. The case of OSA intersects with the social, economic, and political dynamics of the imperial capital in the late nineteenth century. Although its leadership was dominated by intellectuals and well-to-do entrepreneurs, the majority of the OSA members were middle-class Istanbulites. In this respect, an analysis of the OSA offers valuable insights into the land and housing market of late Ottoman Istanbul.

The analysis of how the magazine *Dndes* promoted the OSA offers important clues towards understanding consumer/investor expectations. “Savings” appear as a key concept in *Dndes*. Based on the merits of savings for personal and social well-being, *Dndes* encouraged its readers to invest in OSA through small installments so as to enjoy both monetary return and house ownership. Yet, there are subtle cultural aspects related to owning a house. These included living in a “suburban” way—that is, in a newly constructed neighborhood on the margins of the city. The OSA’s suburban settlement would have all the amenities—schools, houses of worship, and a police station. In addition to the civic institutions, there were other aspects which made this project more attractive to consumers. One of them was the suburban railway connection with the city.⁷⁶ Likewise, references to “doctors’ choices” in

72 BOA, DH.SAİD. 157–75.

73 Yeprem Poghosyan, *Patmutiwn Hay Mshakutayin Enkerutyuneru* (Vienna: Mkhitarian Tparan, 1957), 1:45.

74 Ayşe Ozil, “Whose Property Is It? The State, Non-Muslim Communities, and the Question of Property Ownership from the Late Ottoman Empire through the Turkish Nation State,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 6, no. 1 (2019): 211–235.

75 Turgay Gökçen, “Zeytinburnu Gecekonduları,” in *Surların Öte Yanı Zeytinburnu*, ed. Burçak Evren, 3rd ed. (Istanbul: Zeytinburnu Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2005), 372.

76 The OSA project was a precursor to the later suburban housing development projects in the area such as the Ataköy

Dndes, in addition to the class and the professions of its members, also highlighted that public health was seen as an important factor in the housing market of the city at the time. These aspects of the OSA, alongside its goals concerning the procurement of urban rent, provide a nuanced picture of the metanarrative of modernization of Istanbul which highlight the role of the state and grand plans, and it adds another layer to the continuities and ruptures in the urban development of Istanbul.

The members' profile of the OSA is an essential asset to understand the involvement of the non-elite in the land market of the imperial capital. Although it claimed to be a nonprofit, savings association, the "interest" that the OSA would have paid to the members, had it been successful, would have come from the increasing value of the land. Therefore, in addition to Istanbulites' practical motivations to participate in the project, its membership boosted quickly as it was a extremely lucrative investment with high monetary returns.

Prospects of economic benefits attracted various actors to the OSA, urban investors and ecclesiastical authorities as well as officials in government bureaus. Their participation in this shared understanding of urban rent facilitated the project to such a degree that even the Ministry of Police was left surprised that this extensive association could survive and expand without registration right under the nose of the Hamidian officials for many years. The police investigation insinuated corruption. However, the corruption was not in the sense that the OSA was illegal and delivered bribes, which could indeed have been the case. Instead, corruption in this context signified the belief that the association attracted various government officials, including those that were in the position of regulating this kind of project, such as the officials in the Ministry of Pious Foundations and the municipalities.

The social history of the OSA as presented in this article demonstrates the role of collective private investment in the urbanization of late Ottoman Istanbul. The investors' agency in creating investment institutions, payment schemes, plans, small-scale infrastructural developments underline the role of capital in shaping the urban landscape. Moreover, the case of the OSA encapsulates the relations, and in most cases the discrepancy, between the regulations on paper and how they were put into practice; the transformation of inalienable waqf lands into private property; negotiations between the investors and the municipalities over procedures and fees; and the direct involvement of officials in the project notwithstanding their role as superintendents. Thus, the OSA case sheds light on the expansion of Istanbul into the surrounding agricultural and barren lands in this period by taking urban rent into focus. This was not a result of population pressure or a cultural drive for suburbanization but for the transformation of the land into a lucrative investment in late Ottoman Istanbul.

Project of the 1950s. Before it turned into blocks for mass housing in its later stages, the Ataköy project primarily aimed to attract people to a suburban life in houses with gardens. The boulevard passing by the shore, which linked the area to the city, was a major factor in its popularity. Murat Güvenç and Oğuz Işık, *Emlak Bankası, 1926–1998* (Istanbul: Emlak Bankası, 1999).

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