

WHEN THE ADHAN AND THE BELLS MET: WESTERN FICTION PERSPECTIVES ON THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES'S NOVEL *BIRDS WITHOUT WINGS*

EZAN VE ÇANLAR BULUŞTUĞUNDA: LOUIS DE BERNIÈRES'İN *KANATSIZ
KUŞLAR* ROMANINDA OSMANLI İMPARATORLUĞUNA İLİŞKİN BATI
KURGU PERSPEKTİFLERİ

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ABSTRACT: The Ottoman Empire offers a striking historical example of religious pluralism long before the modern era. By implementing the millet system, exercising adaptable governance, and demonstrating cultural openness, the Empire created significant opportunities for Muslims, Christians, and Jews to coexist within a shared society. This research addresses the portrayal of the Ottoman Empire in Western fiction using four different novels, but basically focusing on Louis de Bernières's novel *Birds Without Wings*. The study examines the religious and social tolerance, pluralism, syncretism, coexistence, solidarity, interfaith, and intermarriage between different faiths and races in the Ottoman Empire. The analysis is informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawing on multiculturalism (Bhikhu Parekh; Will Kymlicka), postcolonial theory (Homi K. Bhabha), nationalism studies (Benedict Anderson), and memory studies (Svetlana Boym) to interpret the dynamics of coexistence and its eventual disintegration. It also sheds light on the question of non-Muslims' loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. The research also addresses some ill-conceived policies after the dissolution of the Empire, like the compulsory population exchange between Turkey and Greece. This study contends that the erosion and eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire precipitated in the disintegration of its once-stable intercommunal harmony and social cohesion. Three primary factors drove this fragmentation: (1) the Empire's decline and institutional dissolution, (2) protracted conflicts—including the Balkan Wars, World War I, and the Greco-Turkish War—which exacerbated sectarian tensions, and (3) the global ascendancy of nationalist ideologies that prioritized ethnic and religious divisions over unity.

Keywords: The Ottoman Empire, *Birds Without Wings*, Religious Harmony, Social Coexistence, Population Exchange

ÖZ: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, modern dönem öncesinde dini çoğulculuğun çarpıcı bir tarihsel örneğini sunmaktadır. Millet sistemini uygulayarak, esnek bir yönetim anlayışı benimseyerek ve kültürel açıklık sergileyerek, Müslümanlar, Hristiyanlar ve Yahudilerin ortak bir toplumda bir arada yaşamasına önemli fırsatlar tanımıştır. Bu araştırma, Batı edebiyatında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun temsilini dört farklı roman üzerinden incelemekle birlikte, temel olarak Louis de Bernières'in *Kanatsız Kuşlar* adlı eserine odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki dini ve sosyal hoşgörüyü, çoğulculuğu, senkretizmi, bir arada yaşamı, dayanışmayı, dinlerarası ve etnik gruplar arası evlilikleri analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma, birlikte yaşama dinamiklerini ve bunların çözülme sürecini yorumlamak amacıyla çok kültürlülük

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(Bhikhu Parekh; Will Kymlicka), postkolonyal kuram (Homi K. Bhabha), milliyetçilik çalışmaları (Benedict Anderson) ve bellek çalışmaları (Svetlana Boym) gibi disiplinlerarası bir kuramsal çerçeveden yararlanmaktadır. Ayrıca, gayrimüslimlerin Osmanlı'ya bağlılığı sorusuna ışık tutmaktadır. Araştırma, imparatorluğun dağılmasının ardından Türkiye ve Yunanistan arasındaki zorunlu nüfus mübadelesi gibi tartışmalı politikaları da ele almaktadır. Bu çalışma, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun zayıflaması ve nihai çöküşünün, bir zamanlar istikrarlı olan toplumsal uyumun ve dinlerarası ahengin bozulmasına yol açtığını savunmaktadır. Bu parçalanmayı tetikleyen üç temel faktör şunlardır: (1) İmparatorluğun gerilemesi ve kurumsal çözülmesi, (2) Balkan Savaşları, I. Dünya Savaşı ve Türk-Yunan Savaşı gibi uzun süreli çatışmaların mezhep gerilimlerini şiddetlendirmesi, (3) etnik ve dini bölünmeleri birlik fikrinin önüne çıkaran milliyetçi ideolojilerin küresel yükselişi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Kanatsız Kuşlar, Dini Ahenk, Toplumsal Birliklilik, Nüfus Mübadelesi

Introduction

Several Western novels examine the Ottoman Empire, including *Birds Without Wings* by English novelist Louis de Bernières, *The Janissary Tree* by English novelist and historian Jason Goodwin, *The Bridge on the Drina* by Yugoslav novelist and Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić, and *The Sultan's Seal* by German-American author Jenny White. Through meticulous examination, this study examines the portrayal of the Ottoman Empire in these novels and Western fiction and focuses on themes of social and religious coexistence, as well as harmony among different faiths and ethnicities. The study also draws on Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity to examine how identities in the novels are constructed through ongoing cultural interaction rather than fixed religious or ethnic categories. This study adopts a qualitative literary analysis approach and concentrates primarily on Louis de Bernières's novel *Birds without Wings*. The novel's title is attractive; its narrator says that humans are wingless birds and birds are sorrowless humans. The title likely references Karatavuk and Mehmetçik, for whom Iskander the potter crafted whistles resembling birds, prompting them to mimic avian behavior and flap their arms with whistles in their mouths.

The Ottoman Empire was a diverse empire characterized by multiple ethnicities, religions, cultures, and sects. For generations, individuals resided beneath its shade in tranquility and safety. Eskibahçe exemplifies this phenomenon. In *Birds Without Wings*, Louis de Bernières depicts the religious concord among many religions in Eskibahçe, a town in southern Anatolia, near Fethiye, Turkey. Eskibahçe "provides a community of Ottoman citizens living in harmony despite their ethnic, religious, economic, social and individual differences" (Golban and Yürükler, 2019: 410). This town is a remarkable mosaic, encompassing the affluent and the impoverished, Muslims, Greeks, and Armenians, alongside mosques and churches coexisting in a degree of stability and accord within an imperial framework that nonetheless preserved social hierarchies. Like Muslims,

Christians and Armenians identified themselves as Ottomans and sought to defend the state with their very beings.

Louis de Bernières' *Birds Without Wings* is a historical novel that chronicles the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of modern Turkey amid the power struggles of World War I. While portraying the Ottoman era as a model of pluralistic tolerance, the story underscores the catastrophic consequences of its dissolution, marked by sectarian radicalization and exclusionary nationalisms. The novel exposes the brutalities of war, forced displacements, and the suffering endured by civilians during the turbulent birth of the Turkish nation-state. De Bernières portrays his characters as powerless victims, caught in conflicts orchestrated by global powers or, as he sardonically calls them, the great world.

This research illustrates the perspective of Western fiction on the Ottoman Empire and the theological and social dynamics among many ethnicities and religions, using the novel *Birds Without Wings* as a sample. Although the Ottoman Empire's system of religious pluralism has been widely examined in historical scholarship, and *Birds Without Wings* has received some literary attention, limited research has explored how Western historical fiction represents Ottoman intercommunal coexistence and its subsequent disintegration. In particular, there is a lack of studies focusing on how such narratives construct and interpret the Empire's pluralistic social fabric within the context of its collapse. This study addresses this gap by offering a focused literary analysis of *Birds Without Wings*, while drawing on other Western novels for contextual support, in order to examine how religious coexistence, interfaith relations, and social cohesion are depicted in the Ottoman context. The novel can also be read through Svetlana Boym's (2001) concept of reflective nostalgia, which frames the narrative as a meditation on the loss of a historically contingent yet meaningful form of intercommunal coexistence.

The study argues that the novel reconstructs an image of Ottoman pluralism while simultaneously portraying its collapse as a consequence of war, nationalism, and modern state formation. This shift from imperial pluralism to exclusionary national identities can be further understood through Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined communities," which explains how nationalism constructs collective identities by redefining belonging along linguistic, ethnic, and religious lines. While Western fiction often portrays the Ottoman Empire as a space of intercommunal harmony, this representation should not obscure the structural inequalities embedded within the imperial system, particularly the hierarchical nature of the millet system and the privileged legal status of Muslims over non-Muslims. Therefore, this study does not treat Ottoman coexistence as an ideal model, but rather examines how it is selectively constructed and narrated in Western fiction. The study focuses on non-Muslims' loyalty, intermarriage, interfaith, religious diversity, and social

coexistence in the Empire. It also exposes some debated policies in post-Ottoman governance, including the mandatory population exchange between the newly established Turkish Republic and Greece and the transition from the Ottoman Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet.

The study contends that the decline and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire accelerated the deterioration of societal cohesion and religious concord. This can be ascribed to three factors: The initial factor is the collapse and eventual dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, followed by the conflicts: the Balkan Wars, World War I, and the Greco-Turkish War, with the third reason being the global ascendance of nationalism. Finally, this research contends that the morality of subjects is shaped by their rulers. Accordingly, with the fall of the Ottoman sultans, the policy of religious and sectarian unity began to wane, particularly under the influence of new regimes that promoted ethnic division and enforced displacement. As a result, long-standing interfaith coexistence deteriorated, giving way to deepening sectarian rifts and the fragmentation of communities that had lived together for centuries under Ottoman governance.

Tolerance and Pluralism: Religious Diversity in the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire (1299–1923) was one of history’s most diverse and enduring states, which spanned three continents and encompassed a multitude of religions, languages, and cultures. Ivo Andrić (1945: 245), in his novel *The Bridge on the Drina* highlights that under Ottoman rule there was a “complete national unity, religious tolerance, and civil equality”. Based on Andrić’s vision, unlike other contemporary empires, which often enforced religious uniformity, the Ottomans developed a system that allowed different faiths to coexist under imperial rule. In 1856, “Sultan Abdülmeceid issued an edict on religious equality” (Howard, 2017: 524). This relative religious harmony was maintained through legal protections, administrative policies, and social traditions that recognized diversity while also ensured stability.

The millet system “guaranteed religious liberty for all. Despite some lapses, for almost all of its history the empire had protected the different denominations, allowing them to administer their own affairs and follow their own laws” (de Bernières, 2005: 288). The cornerstone of religious coexistence in the Ottoman Empire was the millet system. A form of communal autonomy granted to non-Muslim religious groups. Drawing on Bhikhu Parekh and Will Kymlicka, the Ottoman millet system can be interpreted as an early form of institutionalized multiculturalism that enabled coexistence while also maintained asymmetrical power relations. From a multiculturalist perspective and through Parekh’s theory, the millet system can be understood as an early form of institutionalized cultural pluralism that allowed distinct communities to preserve their identities while coexisting under a shared political framework. Similarly, Kymlicka

(1995) helps explain how such arrangements can sustain diversity through group-differentiated rights, while still reflecting structural inequalities between dominant and minority communities. Each religious community—Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Jewish, and later Catholic and Protestant—was organized as a millet (nation) under its own religious leader (Imber, 2002: 216; Braude and Lewis, 1982).¹ These leaders acted as intermediaries between their communities and the Ottoman state. They also handled their internal legal, educational and administrative matters according to their religious laws. In line with Hacker's (2014) and Clogg's (2014) views, the millet system allowed Christians, Jews, and other minorities to practice their faith freely, maintain their places of worship, and even adjudicate civil disputes within their communities.²

In the *Birds Without Wings*, the author illustrates the imam and the bishop praying collaboratively for societal welfare and reform. The Imam of Eskibahçe, Abdulhamid Hodja, and the priest, Father Kristoforos, had established a pleasant rapport founded on mutual respect, with each argument concluding with the remark, “well, after all, we are both peoples of the Book” (de Bernières, 2005: 38). Muslims and non-Muslims looked like each other, and they were similar to the degree that Father Kristoforos adopted a lifestyle resembling that of an imam. Their indistinguishable appearance in daily life illustrates a hybrid social reality in which identity was negotiated rather than predetermined. Washaly (URL-2) emphasizes that the Ottoman Empire “was a multicultural and multi-religious country” (2022: 2). The empire's multicultural character was particularly evident in its architecture, cuisine, and language. Ottoman Turkish absorbed words from Arabic, Persian, Greek, and Armenian, and it also gave many words to those languages. Many churches and synagogues stood near mosques what symbolizes a degree of rare coexistence in pre-modern Europe. This everyday proximity and cultural exchange reflect what Homi K. Bhabha (1994) describes as hybridity, where social life unfolds through shared practices that blur rigid religious and cultural boundaries. One “could hear seventy languages in the streets of Istanbul” (de Bernières, 2005: 167). Jenny White's novel *The Sultan's Seal* illustrates this linguistic and cultural diversity through a character's observation: “I was surrounded by the babble of their many languages: Turkish, Greek, Italian, Armenian, Arabic” (2006: 105). White's novel manifests the entanglement between languages: “Greek, Latin, and, of course, Ottoman, that convolution of Persian, Arabic, and Turkish” (White, 2006: 40). Furthermore, Evangelia Balta (2011) argues that

¹ See also Mehrdad Kia, in his work *Daily life in the Ottoman Empire*, Kia (2011: 112) remarks that each “religious community, or millet, enjoyed cultural and legal autonomy and managed its own internal affairs under the leadership of its own religious hierarchy ... As a self-governing body, which was responsible for managing its own internal affairs, each millet elected its own leader, who received the blessing and approval of the sultan”.

² On the Jewish legal system, see Joseph R. Hacker (2014), and on the Greek legal system, see Richard Clogg (2014: 32).

many Greek and Armenian Christians, along with Jewish communities, grew up speaking Turkish as their first language. While some Muslims were native speakers of Greek or Armenian. Jason Goodwin's (2007: 77) protagonist in his novel *The Janissary Tree* embodies this since he can speak "Ottoman Turkish, Greek ecclesiastical and demotic, Romanian, Armenian, and French, but Russian badly".

The expansive reach of the Ottoman Empire rendered it commonplace for diverse ethnic groups to coexist across its territories, Greeks residing in Egypt, Persians in Arabia, and Albanians among Slavs. Followers of different faiths—Christians, Muslims (including Alevis), Zoroastrians, Jews, and even devotees of the Peacock Angel—thrive side by side, often in the most unexpected places and cultural blends. The empire fostered unique identities: Muslim Greeks, Catholic Armenians, Arab Christians, and Serbian Jews were all part of its intricate social fabric. In the opinion of Peri (2001: 45), the Ottoman Islamic rule has "contributed greatly towards the preservation of the Holy Sites' pan-Christian quality. This of course had significant implications for the evolution of the Holy Sites as Christianity's holiest shrines". Furthermore, de Bernières demonstrates how they held mutual beliefs in each other's doctrines and convictions. The Ottoman Christians adhered to several Islamic practices, and some of them were "buried with a silver cross wrapped in a scrap of the Koran enfolded in their hands" (de Bernières, 2005: 151). In the narrative and in a remarkable display of interfaith devotion, Christian Lydia had approached Ayse, the wife of Imam Abdulhamid, pleading for the small paper strips containing Quranic verses that the holy man prepared for ailing believers. Though swallowing the papers felt strange at first, Lydia discovered an unexpected sense of spiritual solace when she simply let the sacred fragments rest on her tongue, allowing them to gradually dissolve completely. When Philothei was born, Abdulhamid Hodja kissed her right hand. This incident made her Christian family feel that she had become more beautiful. Even the Christians "believed that the imam was a saint" (de Bernières, 2005: 13). In the Western fiction, the deep cultural intertwining between Christians and Muslims was so profound that even religious boundaries sometimes blurred. One time, Father Kristoforos told his wife what he thought was a Christian saying. She gently corrected him and told him that it was actually an Islamic aphorism. Such moments revealed how seamlessly shared wisdom flowed between faiths, to the point that even a priest could unknowingly quote from another religion's traditions.

Barkey (2008: 170) stresses that in Anatolia "Islamic and Christian understanding flourished together, sharing some beliefs, traditions, and often rituals". The Muslims of Eskibahçe also believed in the Christian rituals. In this town, you could see a "mixed party of Muslims and Christians took their first steps towards Ephesus, making pilgrimage together to the house of the Virgin Mary" (de Bernières, 2005: 172). Ottoman Muslims brought offerings of yeast, salt, eggs, and bread to Christian churches. They honored

Jesus and the Virgin Mary herself as sacred figures who belong to both faith traditions. During Easter celebrations, Muslim neighbors joined their Christian brethren in churches and participated in sacred rituals with deep reverence. They lit candles before icons, anointed the tombs of saints with olive oil, and later used this blessed oil as a healing unction. This can be seen as a testament of the shared spiritual practices that transcended religious boundaries in Ottoman society. Muslims implored Mother Mary for favours in their prayers. Muslim Ayse requested Polyxeni to ask their Christian nun to intercede on her behalf. She also requested from Polyxeni to light a candle, kiss the icon, and beseech the Panagia to heal Tamara Hanim. The religious rituals and celebrations held by the Christians were a source of happiness for the Muslims in the town; therefore, when the Christians left Eskibahçe and “took their icon of Mary Mother of Jesus with them, there are some who think that [they] have had less good luck than [they] did before” (de Bernières, 2005: 5). This blending of different religions according to Krstic (2011: 52) is characterized as syncretism, which is a “term that has become a code word for the latitudinarian nature of the early Ottoman religious politics and seamless incorporation of non-Muslims into the Ottoman state and society”.

In the novels, bonds of friendship and loyalty in the Ottoman world often transcended religious divisions. In *Birds Without Wings*, Karatavuk, a Muslim, maintained a close friendship with Mehmetçik, a Christian whose real name was Nicos, and was reportedly willing to sacrifice himself for his companion. When Mehmetçik was being pursued for a bounty, Karatavuk urged him to take his red shirt as a disguise, while he himself wore it to draw pursuers away. In doing so, he was shot and his right hand was paralyzed. This injury forced him to abandon his profession as a potter and write with his left hand instead of his right. Their friendship which was unshaken by faith or danger stood as a testament to the human connections that defied the era’s sectarian tensions. Similarly, Rustem Bey openly favored his Christian wife over his Muslim spouse and valued the companionship of his Italian officer friend above that of his fellow Muslims. He also sheltered three Armenian girls and honored a promise to their father by shielding them from persecution and almost certain death. In a time when religious identity dictated considerably, Rustem Bey’s actions revealed a deeper code of loyalty. A loyalty that was rooted in personal honor rather than dogma. All this togetherness, tolerance, and everyday coexistence according to Krstic (2011: 96) can be attributed to the “Ottoman syncretism and conciliatory attitudes toward Christians” (Krstic, 2011: 96).

Coexistence and Solidarity: Examining Social Relations in the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was marked by a complex yet functional system of coexistence. This allowed diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities to live together under a single imperial framework. Stanford Shaw (1976: vii & 59) underscores that Muslims, Christians, and Jews, in

addition to various ethnic groups such as Turks, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, and Slavs coexisted not only in urban centers but also in rural areas. They often engaged in mutual economic, cultural, and even familial ties.³ Even though tensions existed, particularly during periods of political instability or reform, the broader pattern was marked by negotiated solidarity and pragmatic tolerance. This model of social organization, though hierarchical and imperfect, enabled a relative stability and intercommunal cooperation that challenges modern assumptions about pre-modern imperial rule. In the tight-knit community of Eskibahçe, “there was no one in that town who was not in some way a relation of everybody else” (de Bernières, 2005: 33). During the presence of Italian soldiers in the town of Eskibahçe, social connections and friendships were formed between them and the Ottoman soldiers. The narrative shows Ottoman gendarmerie officers exchanging personal belongings with Italian troops, including one sergeant’s gift of a backgammon set to his counterpart. In *The Sultan’s Seal*, Jenny White (2006: 39) depicts how “children of wealthy Muslims, Jews, Armenians, Greeks, and other sons of the far-flung empire” played together, emphasizing intercommunal harmony.

This pattern of everyday coexistence was not only a product of social interaction but was also shaped by formal legal and administrative reforms within the Ottoman Empire. One of the main characteristics of the Ottoman Tanzimat as Tomas Kuehn (2011: 111) points out was the social “equality of Muslims and non-Muslims before the law”. De Bernières argues that there was social equality during Ottoman rule; an individual, whether “was a Muslim, or a Syrian Christian, or a Yezidi, no one ever knew” (2005: 68) because “the Christians had won equal rights” (2005: 129). This *unavoidably* drew populations that had coexisted for ages, especially after the empire “officially operated a policy known as Ottomanisation, whereby all races had equal rights, liberties and duties” (de Bernières, 2005: 304). Western fiction represents the Ottoman rule as just, and rare or no special privileges were afforded to any particular ethnic or religious group. The Sultans granted the “political and social equality with the empire’s native non-Muslims” (Gingeras, 2016: 17). The symbolic embrace of rabbis and imams underscored a spirit of mutual respect and relative intercommunal harmony. Subsequent to the departure of the Christians from the city, only few Muslim extremists assert that life was preferable without Christians. Many Osmanlis, such as Iskander the potter, conversely, contend that true happiness entails embracing people, irrespective of their identity, faith, or race. For him, the existence of others enables self-reflection. They “were very much mixed up ... lived together in sufficient harmony” (de Bernières, 2005: 10). Historical records also indicate that while Christians predominantly inhabited the valleys and Muslims the mountainous areas, village

³ See also Kia (2011: 111).

communities were often integrated, in “many villages, Christians and Muslims lived together” (Barkey, 2008: 44).

Drosoula, a Greek resident of Eskibahçe who was exiled to Greece, reflected that throughout the centuries of Ottoman rule, the Turks had never inflicted upon them anything as devastating as the violence Greeks committed against one another during the civil war. The Ottomans treated the Greeks well; there was “intermarriage and changing of faiths” (De Bernières, 2005: 270). Philothei, a Greek Christian girl, was long engaged to Ibrahim, a Muslim boy, with an agreement that upon marriage, she would identify as a “Christian Muslim” (De Bernières, 2005: 240). Philothei and Ibrahim’s betrothal was not unprecedented in Eskibahçe, as many Muslim and Christian families have traditionally intermarried for generations (Renda and Inalcık, 2009). Kia (2011: 200) indicates that if a Muslim man married a Jewish or Christian woman, he had to allow “his non-Muslim wife to retain her religion and attend religious services required by her faith”. This prompted Ayse to remark that Christians were “not so different” (de Bernières, 2005: 238). Ayse’s perspective reflected generations of coexistence. To her, Christian neighbors differed only in minor rituals not in their fundamental humanity. In this sense, Jenny White (2006: 40) underscores in her novel that despite their differences, Michel being Christian and Kamil being Muslim, “social class, religion, or language” did not separate them.

Iskander the potter, one of the residents of Eskibahçe, points out that “life was merrier when the Christians were still among us” (de Bernières, 2005: 1). De Bernières’s fiction reveals that the forced expulsion of Armenians, Greeks, and other minor communities was a profoundly painful experience for both the displaced and the Ottoman residents of Eskibahçe. In an extraordinary display of social solidarity, the local Muslim population chose to personally escort their non-Muslim neighbors on their journey to ensure their safety. They helped to carry their neighbors’ possessions and safeguard their valuables and treasures with the expectation of returning subsequently. Notably, even impoverished individuals like Ali the Snow-bringer demonstrated extraordinary compassion. He donated his donkey to transport an elderly Christian woman during the forced march. Furthermore, when the government forces arrived at Eskibahçe to deport the Armenians, the situation turned violent as tribesmen attempted to assault Levon’s daughters. Rustem Bey, the town’s agha, intervened decisively, declaring the girls to be his family’s promised brides. Though he wielded his influence as the region’s most powerful landlord to protect many Armenians, even his authority had limits against the state’s iron decree.

Ottomanism Before Faith: Non-Muslims’ Loyalty to the Ottoman Empire

Christine Philliou (2009) notes that non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire were more loyal to the state than to their religion. In the fictional

narrative, when the mobilization orders arrived, Sergeant Osman and the gendarmes were rounding up the soldiers. Mehmetçik (Nicos) was eager to enlist and fight for the Ottoman Sultanate, but they reminded him that, as a Christian, he was exempt from military service. In response, he declared, “I am an Ottoman” (de Bernières, 2005: 293). In *The Sultan’s Seal*, Michel tells Kamil: “We’re on the same side ... We’re not Muslims and we’re not Turks, we’re Ottomans” (White, 2006: 300). In this context, Molly Greene (2000) states that many non-Muslims defended the Empire during crises, such as the Crimean War and the Balkan Wars, and helped the state against foreign Christian adversaries. Furthermore, they opposed all forms of nationalism; many denounced separatist activities (e.g., several Armenians resisted the Armenian revolutionary factions, while some Greeks remained loyal during the Greek War of Independence).

Additionally, during the population exchange between Turkey and Greece, the Greeks of Eskibahçe declined to vacate their residences, asserting: “We are not Greek; we are Ottomans” (de Bernières, 2005: 542). Mehmetçik was a Greek fugitive sought by the authorities. One day, he returned to visit his family in Eskibahçe, but he was unable to locate them. During his conversation with Karatavuk, he enquired about his family. When Karatavuk mentioned the obligatory evacuation, Mehmetçik remarked that he observed the Army apprehending the Greeks, but he did not believe his family was included. In Eskibahçe, all the Greeks were born there; thus, they spoke solely Ottoman Turkish, had no knowledge of Greek, and had never set foot in Greece. He was surprised that the authorities categorized them as Greeks instead of Ottomans.

At Telmessos,⁴ during the evacuation of Greeks to Greece, some Christians kissed the ground, while others collected leaves, flowers, insects, feathers, or handfuls of soil as mementos of their homeland. As the ship prepared to depart from the quay, there was an abundance of embraces and tears, accompanied by heartfelt promises. The young boys who could swim ventured out after the ship for a short distance. The Ottoman authorities secured the loyalty of non-Muslim communities by empowering their religious leaders. The loyalty of non-Muslim millet leaders to the sultans was ensured because they gained significantly more authority over their communities—both in religious and secular affairs—than they could have exercised in Christian countries (Shaw & Shaw, 1977: 164).

Conversely, there were constraints on loyalty, as some non-Muslims maintained a robust religious identity and prioritized faith over allegiance to the state, particularly in rural regions. In the latter years of the Ottoman Empire, a surge of nationalism influenced by European ideals and Enlightenment principles prompted numerous minorities to demand independence. Thereby undermining loyalty to the Ottoman state. As the

⁴ Telmessos is an ancient city located now in Mugla, Turkey. The contemporary town situated on the site is called Fethiye.

empire weakened, nationalist groups emerged among Balkan Christians including Greeks, Serbs, and Bulgarians. Regrettably, orthodox Armenians were frequently enticed by their religious attachments to support the Russians against their Ottoman compatriots, with some enlisting in the Russian military. To summarize, the majority of non-Muslims exhibited loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, particularly during its initial centuries under the millet system. However, over time, modernization, nationalism, and external meddling caused allegiance to fracture and resulted in uprisings, repression, and eventual secession.

Ill-conceived Policies Following the Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire

One of the flawed decisions that shaped the post-Ottoman order was the 1923 compulsory population exchange between Turkey and Greece. It was one of the most significant demographic transformations of the 20th century. The population exchange was mandated by the Treaty of Lausanne.⁵ This arrangement displaced about 1.5 million individuals, Orthodox Christians from Turkey and Muslims from Greece, based exclusively on religious identity rather than language or ethnicity. Its legacy is continuous as it changed both countries and left displaced people with deep wounds. The rationale was straightforward; Greece would remove its Muslim population to Turkey, while Turkey would transfer its Orthodox Christians to Greece. Both governments, the Turkish and the Greek, followed the policy of one religion and prioritized religion over national identity, disregarding linguistic, cultural, and regional differences. Goodwin's (2007: 68) fiction mourns a lost community, recalling: "We were more than family. We had a world within a world. We had our own food, our own justice, our own manner of religion. Yes, yes, our own manner". Likewise, Ivo Andrić (1945: 77) in his narrative voice stresses that "Turks, Christians and Jews mingled together". This population exchange represents the extreme institutionalization of imagined national boundaries, where religious identity became the primary marker of belonging within newly constructed national communities.

The population exchange left the "fabric of the new Turkish Republic in tatters" (Ágoston and Masters, 2009: 59). This sense of rupture aligns with Svetlana Boym's (2001) notion of reflective nostalgia, which does not seek to restore the past but instead dwells on its fragmentation and the irretrievable loss of lived coexistence. Families were compelled to go with minimal warning, permitted only one bag per individual, frequently

⁵ The treaty was signed at Lausanne, January 30, 1923. The seventh article of the agreement states: The emigrants will lose the nationality of the country which they are leaving, and will acquire the nationality of the country of their destination. The second article of the treaty states that Istanbul Greeks and Muslims in Western Thrace are exempted from the exchange. Around 500,000 Muslims (mostly ethnic Turks, but also including Albanian and Roma communities) were expelled from Greece to Turkey. For more check the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website at: (URL-3).

resulting in the loss of belongings. A multitude perished during the expedition as a result of illness, malnutrition, or assaults. This resulted in cultural displacement; entire towns were relocated to foreign territories. Turkish-speaking Christians in Greece and Greek-speaking Muslims in Turkey encountered discrimination. The situation caused economic and social upheaval. Greece had challenges in accommodating 1.2 million refugees. While Turkey resettled Balkan Muslims in deserted Greek villages, thus modifying regional demographics (Shaw & Shaw, 1977:141, 189, 203, 239, 242, and 325). Culturally, the exchange erased centuries of heritage and vibrant communities like the Cappadocian Greeks and Cretan Muslims disappeared almost overnight. The exchange also left behind empty churches and mosques as haunting reminders of a lost past. Generations later, the trauma endured. Descendants still recount stories of exile, with some preserving ancestral languages like Pontic Greek or Cretan Turkish as fragile links to their roots. Diplomatically, the legacy of the exchange remains a controversial issue between Greece and Turkey. This shows how deeply this engineered population transfer reshaped both nations.

Through his portrayal of Eskibahçe's inhabitants, de Bernières gives voice to the anguish of countless innocent lives upended by the population exchange. The initial announcement of the agreement left the community in stunned silence, the decree seemed incomprehensible. Their desperate protests echoed through the village: "We can't just leave everything behind ... Why should we go? We don't need protecting. No one will hurt us here" (de Bernières, 2005: 306). Drosoula, among those forcibly exiled to Greece, would later confess: "When I came here I didn't even speak Greek, didn't you know that? I still dream in Turkish sometimes" (de Bernières, 2005: 20).⁶ Many exchanged populations did not speak the language of their new homeland. *Birds Without Wings* describes the population exchange as a "demographic Catastrophe" (de Bernières, 2005: 519). The collapse of specialized industries, medical desertification, commercial dislocation, and architectural loss were some of the drawbacks of the Greeks' deportation. The Ottomans were "soldiers and peasants and landowners, but Christians were merchants and craftsmen. Their loss will delay economic recovery for decades" (de Bernières, 2005: 519). The expulsion of Greek communities from Turkey caused significant socioeconomic consequences such as the depletion of skilled labor across multiple sectors. The nation lost not only artisans and medical professionals but also a vast reservoir of specialized knowledge in critical professions that Greek populations had traditionally dominated.⁷

⁶ Drosoula also says: "When we left Anatolia that we loved so much and will probably mourn for ever" (de Bernières, 2005: 23).

⁷ The novel also mentions that after the departure of the Greeks "there was no pharmacist now, no doctor, no banker, no blacksmith, no shoemaker, no saddle maker, no ironmonger, no paint-maker, no jeweller, no stonemason, no tiler, no merchant, no spicer" (de Bernières, 2005: 608).

In *Birds Without Wings*, Günaydın Albay (2024: 272) argues that “De Bernières challenges the legitimacy of criteria like race, religion, and language in the context of nation-building. He mourns the departure of Greek residents from an Anatolian town, lamenting the loss of an idyllic way of life”. Furthermore, Svetlana Boym (2001: 50) explains, “reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home”, but instead dwells on loss, fragmentation, and memory. In this sense, *Birds Without Wings* does not idealize the Ottoman past; rather, it mourns the disappearance of a fragile yet meaningful world of coexistence that can no longer be restored. The 1923 population exchange between Turkey and Greece was a radical solution to ethnic conflict but at a tremendous human cost. While it stabilized borders, it also erased diverse communities that had coexisted for centuries. It will remain a landmark case of state-managed forced migration in the 20th century. It sets a precedent in international law but also serves as a cautionary tale about the human cost of nationalism and religious division. While it aimed to create peace through separation, it also left deep scars and displaced identities that are still felt in both countries currently. Today, historians debate whether it was a necessary measure for peace or a forced dismantlement of multicultural societies.

Another misguided choice that shaped the post-Ottoman era was the shift from the Ottoman script to the Latin script. Numerous Islamic, Ottoman, and Arab historians and scholars have examined the detrimental effects of transitioning from the Ottoman Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet in Turkey following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. While this shift has been predominantly opposed by Ottoman traditionalists and Islamist scholars, the perspective finds unlikely support from Western scholars like the historian Gábor Ágoston, the writer Bruce Masters, the Turkologist Erik Zürcher, and the English author Louis de Bernières (2005: 518-519), who argues that changing “the alphabet from Arabic to Roman, thereby inadvertently ensuring that almost no future historians will really be able to understand the disordered archives left over from Ottoman times”. Moreover, Ágoston and Masters (2009: 59) remark that there was a generational divide; older generations became functionally illiterate, while younger Turks lost the ability to read pre-1928 texts. While Zürcher (2010: 266-267) reveals that the libraries remained largely unused because most of the books were written in the Ottoman script. It is important here to note that several generations continued to write in that script up until the 1970s. Replacing the Ottoman Arabic writing system with the Roman writing system built a “historical and cultural barrier between the youth of Turkey and their Ottoman forebears” (Ágoston and Masters, 2009: 59). Some scholars, like Ágoston and Masters (2009), look at this matter as well-intentioned but brutal severance from cultural continuity.

The Erosion of Religious Harmony: Root Causes and Catalysts

The four novels insinuate that with the weakness and collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the cohesive fabric and religious harmony in society began

to break down. This research attributes it to three reasons: The first one is the decline and eventual dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the wars including the Balkan Wars, World War I, and the Greco-Turkish War, and the third reason is the global rise of nationalism.

According to the Western narrative, the Ottoman Empire's most remarkable achievement was its maintenance of religious and social harmony among diverse confessional communities over centuries. However, as Ottoman imperial authority waned, the longstanding framework of religious coexistence that had bound diverse communities together began to fragment. The morals of subjects indeed follow their sovereigns. The Ottoman sultans' desire for unity among ethnic and religious communities was reflected in the attitudes of their subjects. Throughout history, rulers have not only shaped the political and economic lives of their subjects but also exerted a profound influence on their ethical standards, cultural norms, and social behaviors. From ancient monarchies to modern states, the conduct of those in power has served as both a model and a justification for the moral climate of society.

In pre-modern societies, the sovereign was often seen as divinely chosen or inherently superior. The ancient maxim "like ruler, like people"⁸ implies that monarchs were not only political leaders but also moral exemplars. In many cases, their private behavior became public policy. During the Enlightenment, philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Montesquieu acknowledged the immense moral influence of political leadership. Rousseau, in particular, emphasized the idea of the *social contract*, arguing that the state is a reflection of the collective will of the people, but also acknowledging that sovereigns, by their virtue or vice, mold the conscience of their nations.

De Bernières insinuates that the sultans' and the Ottoman government's aspiration for concord among ethnic and religious groupings was mirrored in their populace. With the transition of governance and the cessation of sultanate control, a portion of the religious and social tolerance towards other faiths also diminished. De Bernières also criticizes the war between Muslims and Christians, stating that if the Prophet Muhammad and the Prophet Jesus had been alive, they would have prevented this war. Currently, the two prophets observe individuals engaging in warfare and lament their sacrifices and the doctrines they dedicated their lives to imparting. The soldiers on both the Ottoman and Allied fronts believe that those who perish throughout the day will encounter their prophet in heaven that evening and visit him in the garden of his home. Each individual is

⁸ Check Bible Tools website to see what the bible says about like king, like people at (URL-4); King James bible online also says: "As the judge of the people is himself, so are his officers; and what manner of man the ruler of the city is, such are all they that dwell therein." (URL-5).

convinced of their correctness. Nevertheless, this religious fanaticism is futile and yields no consequences.

However, *Birds Without Wings* illustrates that even in the midst of combat, soldiers can maintain bonds of friendship across opposing sides. They exchanged letters, shared food, and even played games together.⁹ These unexpected connections between Allied and Central Powers troops reveal a fundamental human unity that transcends ethnic and religious divisions. This can be considered as a shared hatred of war and violence and a refusal of forced displacement. Yet this natural solidarity is overridden by commanders and politicians who view conflict through the lens of ideology and national interest. While they believe themselves to act for the greater good, these leaders ultimately become the architects of needless wars and senseless suffering. They compel ordinary people to enact visions they never chose. Wars and religious fanaticism are not the choices of folks or soldiers; rather, they are compelled to engage in them. The Ottoman Empire fostered and maintained religious and social harmony among many ethnicities in the region over an extended period. With its decline, this harmony gradually disappeared.

The second reason for the religious intolerance is the outbreak of three wars: The Balkan Wars, World War I, and the Greco-Turkish War. On 8 October 1912, the king of Montenegro proclaimed war against the Ottoman Empire, soon joined by Balkan allies including the Serbs, Greeks, and Bulgarians. There were egregious massacres of Muslims, especially in the vicinity of the Bulgarians. The Balkan wars (1912–1913) signified a violent inflection in Southeastern Europe, altering enduring multiethnic cohabitation into profound religious animosity. Because of this war, “the hell’s broth of religious and nationalist hatred had been stirred up by a multitude of village Hitlers, and the Balkans were irreparably changed for the worse” (de Bernières, 2005: 288). During the Balkan Wars, the public “looked, with greater amounts of suspicion, toward the behavior and loyalties of non-Muslims ... The war and its aftermath, in the view of the most vociferous of Young Turks, demonstrated a clear divide in loyalty between Muslims and Christians,” and this stimulated an “early drive to nationalize the Ottoman economy” (Gingeras, 2016: 94-95). The conflicts—initially against the Ottoman Empire and subsequently among the Balkan states—intensified sectarian differences via widespread violence, coerced

⁹ Here are few quotations that demonstrate the positive rapport among soldiers from diverse camps and faiths: “It was good that we were able to throw gifts to each other” (de Bernières, 2005: 368); “sometimes they threw over chocolate, which I had never had before and which I liked a great deal, and we would throw back sweets and cigarettes... The Franks were living off small round hard pieces of unleavened bread that were called biscuit, and also a kind of meat in tins that was called bully beef. After a time they were fed up with eating it, and they would throw it into our trenches” (de Bernières, 2005: 364); “after this we did not hate each other any more, and I never again shot a Frank who was not engaged directly in a military activity. We had realised that they, too, were men whose hearts had been left behind in the fields about their homes, and after this the war became less holy” (de Bernières, 2005: 368).

displacements, and nationalist propaganda. This war precipitated a refugee crisis and resentment: Hundreds of thousands of Muslim migrants inundated Istanbul and Anatolia, engendering enduring hatred towards Balkan Christians (Ágoston and Masters, 2009: 74).

Further, the eruption of World War I, pitting the Central Powers (Ottoman Empire and Germany) against the Allied forces (Russia, France, and Britain), significantly exacerbated religious divisions between Muslim and non-Muslim populations. Before “World War I, people of opposite faiths and divergent ethnicities in Anatolia used to live in harmony” (URL-2: 8). This global conflict as reported by David Gaunt (2011: 245) increased the anti-Christian animosity, deepened existing sectarian tensions, and created new fault lines along religious identities. Because of World War I, “a great number of non-Muslims are driven out of the new national borders” (Ağıl, 2021: 82). *Birds Without Wings* suggests that many Orthodox Armenians, influenced by religious ties to Russia, allied with Russian forces against the Ottomans, with some even enlisting in their army. As Armenian settlers moved into Muslim-depopulated regions, the broader Armenian community became unfairly branded as traitors in Ottoman eyes. This perception made life perilous for all Armenians—regardless of their actual loyalty, denomination (Protestant, Catholic, or otherwise), or status as Ottoman subjects—since their neighbors could not, or would not, differentiate between them. De Bernières portrays how wartime experiences fundamentally altered Eskibahçe’s communal dynamics. Some Muslim and Greek residents developed new, often adversarial views of their Armenian neighbors. They started to see them through the prism of betrayal rather than as former cohabitants of the village. In Eskibahçe, the villagers stood passively as an Armenian man was brutally beaten by a drunk man. Their collective silence was only broken when Abdulhamid Hodja intervened. The imam’s stern reprimand pierced the crowd’s indifference and stirred long-buried pangs of conscience among the onlookers. Therefore, World War I became the catalyst for the forced deportation of Armenians from Turkey. This irrevocably fractured the centuries-old coexistence between Muslim and Armenian communities. The systematic displacement not only severed communal ties but also embedded deep interethnic wounds that could persist for many generations to come.

Likewise, the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) markedly intensified religious intolerance in Anatolia and the Balkans. It also converted political disputes into sectarian and spiritual clashes. In the 1890s, Ottoman authorities largely refrained from persecuting Greek subjects who openly supported a Greek victory. However, Braude and Lewis (1982: 33) mention that hostility among the Muslim populace toward non-Muslims grew significantly. The Greco-Turkish War turned religion from a personal or communal identity into a politicized and dangerous boundary line. It fed into nationalist ideologies that portrayed the *religious other* as a threat. What followed was not just political separation, but an institutionalization of

religious intolerance. The Greco-Turkish War triggered a mandatory population exchange between Turkey and Greece and segregated communities solely by religion. Lifelong neighbors and families were torn apart. Anatolian Greeks were evicted to Greece while Greek Muslims were expelled to Turkey. This mass displacement, driven by wartime nationalism, entrenched lasting religious divisions among formerly intertwined populations. Every “war is fratricide, and there is therefore an infinite chain of blame ... The triple contagions of nationalism, utopianism and religious absolutism effervesce together into an acid that corrodes the moral metal of a race” (de Bernières, 2005: 286). The Greco-Turkish War announced the collapse of the Ottoman multireligious order and the millet system.

The third factor for religious fanaticism is the emergence of nationalist and ethnic rhetoric with the global ascent of nationalism, jingoism, and extremism. The early 20th century witnessed a global surge in nationalist movements, many of these movements explicitly tied statehood to religious or racial identity. As Benedict Anderson (1983) argues, nations are not natural entities but socially constructed communities, imagined through shared narratives that create a sense of unity while simultaneously excluding those who do not fit the defined national identity. This ideological shift, characterized by exclusionary policies and ethno-religious state-building, profoundly reshaped political landscapes worldwide. Before the emergence of ultranationalism and the departure of Christian villages, and despite the ethnic differences among its residents, their interactions were generally peaceful and cooperative. The predominantly Turkish Muslim and Greek Orthodox villagers can be understood through Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) concept of hybridity, which emphasizes that identities are formed in the “in-between” spaces of cultural interaction rather than as fixed or essential categories. The strict dichotomies created by nationalist discourse are challenged by Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, which contends that identities are formed via continuous cultural exchange rather than being static. When Karatavuk was at the front, he sent a letter to his family explaining how the world had changed, saying that “Nowadays, instead of saying, ‘We are Osmanlis,’ or ‘We are Ottomans,’ people were saying, ‘Yes, we are Turks.’ How strange that the world should change because of words, and words change because of the world” (de Bernières, 2005: 318-319). The transition from “Ottoman” to “Turk” or “Greek” reflects not only political change but a deeper reimagining of communal identity. This shift illustrates what Anderson (1983) describes as the transition from imperial identities to nationally imagined ones, where language and discourse redefine how individuals perceive themselves and others. The miserable absurdity of nationalism destroyed the harmony of the world’s character. As Anderson (1983: 11) argues, “it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny”, meaning that identities once shaped by coexistence and locality become redefined as fixed national destinies. This helps explain how the inhabitants of Eskibahçe, who had long identified primarily as Ottomans, were gradually

compelled to imagine themselves as exclusively Turks or Greeks. The writer Jenny White, who wrote several books and novels on Turkey, also blames the “European nationalism—that crazy idea that every folk with its own language and its own religion deserves its own nation” (White, 2006: 300). Catherine MacMillan (2021: 155) contends that although the Christian and Muslim villagers, shaped by the diverse and interconnected Ottoman Empire, had hybrid identities and lived together peacefully with much cultural commonality, they were ultimately compelled to redefine themselves as ‘Greeks’ and ‘Turks’.

During and after the First World War, the concept of nationalism invigorated many individuals, prompting them to advocate for nationalistic objectives. De Bernières characterizes the nationalist campaigns and revolutionaries as *half-baked*. At this time, “Islam is gradually being replaced by Turkish nationalism” (De Bernières, 2005: 210). White’s and Andrić’s fiction parallels with De Bernières’s fiction in exhibiting that the rise of the voices of extremist nationalists comes at the expense of religion and religious coexistence. In White’s fiction (2006: 141), one of the ultranationalist sates that “we’re Turks ... There’s no need for religion in a Turkish empire. Religion is the enemy of civilization”. This reveals how nationalism actively seeks to erase religious frameworks and recast them as obstacles to progress. Similarly, in Andrić’s fiction (1945: 245), the claim that “modern nationalism will triumph over religious diversities” frames religious difference as something backward that must be overcome.

Together, these perspectives illustrate how nationalist discourse not only marginalizes religion but also redefines diversity as a threat rather than a social asset. This ideological shift contributes to internal conflict, as excessive nationalism fosters divisions not only between religious communities but also within the state itself. Such immoderate nationalism could trigger civil strife between the new Turkish government and the Sultan’s supporters.¹⁰ De Bernières reinforces this critique by explicitly condemning nationalism as a destructive force that disrupts otherwise peaceful coexistence. He argues that what are often celebrated as liberation movements can instead be seen as “unnecessary interruptions of a peaceful life” (URL-1: para. 10). De Bernières’s broader narrative ultimately portrays nationalism as a destabilizing and dehumanizing ideology. One that replaces coexistence with exclusion and transforms cultural differences into sources of conflict. This is further emphasized in his hope that the “false idols of nationalism” will be overthrown (de Bernières, 2005: 167). The aforementioned underscores his view that nationalism operates as a dangerous and deceptive belief system rather than a legitimate path to unity.

¹⁰ The narrator says: “A virtual state of civil war exists between Kemal loyalists and those loyal to the Sultan, particularly between Circassian factions. The Sheikulislam issues a fatwa stating that nationalists are infidels and must be killed. The mufti of Ankara issues a counter-fatwa signed by 250 colleagues, stating that since the Sultan Caliph is a prisoner of the infidels, fatwas issued under duress have no validity.” (De Bernières, 2005: 478).

Conclusion

The Ottoman Empire's legacy of religious coexistence remains a compelling historical model of pluralism in a pre-modern world. Through millet system, pragmatic governance, and cultural flexibility, the Empire fostered remarkable spaces of interfaith concurrence among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. In this respect, *Birds Without Wings* performs what Svetlana Boym (2001) defines as reflective nostalgia, mourning the disappearance of a complex, intercommunal world without fully idealizing its historical realities. In addition to Literary works like *Birds Without Wings*, *The Sultan's Seal*, *The Bridge on the Drina*, and *The Janissary Tree*, historical accounts also reveal moments of shared daily life in the Ottoman world. These sources exhibit aspects of shared economic collaboration and even intellectual exchange that transcended religious divides. Yet this coexistence was not without tensions. Wars, nationalist movements, and modernization efforts eventually strained the Empire's pluralistic fabric. Nevertheless, the Ottoman example invites us to reflect on the delicate balance between unity and diversity. It reminds us that coexistence is neither static nor inevitable, but a negotiated process that requires institutional foresight and communal willingness. In an era of renewed global tensions around identity and belief the Ottoman experiment offers both cautionary lessons and perpetual insights into the possibilities of pluralism.

The Greek Christians who lived in Eskibahçe since their birth exposed to a systematic diaspora. The phrase "Greek Ottomans" indicates that despite their Greek identity, they were citizens or subjects of the Ottoman Empire. And that they were part of a multicultural imperial society, often multilingual and influenced by both Greek and Ottoman (Islamic/Turkish) cultures. After the deportation of the Greeks and Armenians, Eskibahçe commenced a slow death. The houses remained vacant and were not inhabited by anyone. The town transformed into a deserted locale and a ghost town. Survivors from the town perpetually lament and grieve for the bygone era when Christians resided there, a time when the town thrived with energy.

This research argues that the state's morals are reflected in the morals of society and the people, and the state's religious moral principles are also reflected in its people. Justice, morality, religious tolerance, and the morals of the rulers of the Ottoman Empire over the centuries affected their people and were reflected on them so that people of different religions and cultures could live in safety and peace. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed and began to collapse, these social morals began to collapse in their societies as well.

In *Birds Without Wings*, the writer calls for religious brotherhood and the rejection of religious and ethnic fanaticism in all its forms. The narrator offers a striking vision: one might picture Jesus and Muhammad sitting in paradise together in solemn reflection and comparing the unintended

consequences of their earthly ministries. The narrator goes further and declares that if allowed to talk to the Divine, he would emphatically petition for the abolition of all institutionalized religion. Not out of irreverence, but from a longing for unity. Only then, when they are free from the scaffolding of dogma, might the two prophets and two nations finally embrace as eternal brothers.

The relationships between individuals in the Ottoman era are vividly depicted in *Birds Without Wings* as an interconnected and cohesive social fabric. This is illustrated through friendships between individuals of different ages and backgrounds, such as Philothei and Ibrahim, Karatavuk and Mehmetçik, Ayşe and Polyxeni, and Abdulhamid Hodja and Father Kristoforos. They are drawn to each other despite their religious and cultural differences. This amalgamation of religions and ethnicities was indicative of the Ottoman Empire's greater tolerance.

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