

## ARTICLE

# Armenians, Jews, and Humanitarianism in the ‘Age of Questions’, 1830–1900

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## Abstract

Go to Armenia, and you will not find an Armenian. They, too, are an expatriated nation, like the Hebrews...The Armenian has a proverb: ‘In every city of the East I find a home.’ They are everywhere; the rivals of my people, for they are one of the great races, and little degenerated: with all our industry, and much of our energy...<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred; or, The new crusade* (1847)

The historical parallels between Jews and Armenians have long been widespread in both popular and academic spheres: two diasporic, ‘middlemen minorities’ with distinctive religious, cultural, and socio-economic traits whose repeated marginalization and oppression during the nineteenth century culminated in genocide during the twentieth.<sup>2</sup> Throughout history, both peoples have drawn upon their ties to sacred lands to establish some of the most deeply rooted narratives of ethnic identity: the Jews, as biblical dwellers of the

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred; or, The new crusade* (3 vols., London, 1847), II, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Comparisons are made across a wide range of sub-fields. See, for instance, Ina Baghdiantz McCabe, Gelina Harlaftis, and Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglu, eds., *Diaspora entrepreneurial networks: four centuries of history* (Oxford, 2005); William Safran, ‘Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return’, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1 (1991), pp. 83–99; Richard Hovannisian and David Myers, eds., *Enlightenment and diaspora: the Armenian and Jewish cases* (Atlanta, GA, 1999). On the comparison between the genocides, see, for example, Vahakn N. Dadrian, ‘The convergent aspects of the Armenian and Jewish cases of genocide: a reinterpretation of the concept of Holocaust’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 3 (1988), pp. 151–69; Robert Melson, *Revolution and genocide: on the origins of the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago, IL, 1992); Ümit Kurt, ‘Legal and official plunder of Armenian and Jewish properties in comparative perspective: the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 17 (2015), pp. 305–26.

land of Israel; the Armenians as guardians of Mount Ararat, where Noah's Ark is said to have come to rest. As Anthony D. Smith wrote, 'we might think of first-century-C.E. Jews and fifth-century Armenians as approximating to the ideal type of the nation'.<sup>3</sup> It is also this distinctive ethno-religious identity that simultaneously strengthened their diasporic networks of trade, and often singled them out for discrimination in the territories they inhabited.

The persecution and tragedy that loom large in the history of these two groups have earned them an important place in the literature on the origins of modern humanitarianism. Most commonly, they are treated as separate case-studies, or as distinct episodes in a narrative that traces the growing international concern for 'humanity' and 'human rights' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, Jews and Armenians played rather different roles in this narrative, not least because the former had long constituted a prominent minority in Europe itself, whilst the latter were most densely settled in the 'Near' East.<sup>5</sup> Where Jewish history places especial weight on the struggle for 'emancipation' in the emerging nation-states of Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is the Ottoman 'retreat' from that continent which fuelled the marginalization of the Empire's Armenians.<sup>6</sup> The Jewish and Armenian 'Questions' that emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whilst evincing many similarities, appear to be rooted in different contexts.

There were nevertheless clear points of convergence between the two peoples. Eric Weitz showed, for instance, how the Congress of Berlin in 1878 served to single out both Jews and Armenians as 'minorities' in their respective contexts: the former, in the newly autonomous Danubian Principalities, the latter in the Anatolian heartland of the Ottoman Empire. In a world of ascendant nationalism – what Rogers Brubaker, following Lord Curzon, terms the 'Great Unmixing' – both minorities constituted 'a visible disruption of the unity of the nation, and therefore a "problem"'.<sup>7</sup> During the latter decades of the

<sup>3</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The nation in history: historiographical debates about ethnicity and nationalism* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> There is a growing literature on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century origins of humanitarianism, which highlights, in different ways, either the Jewish or Armenian cases. See, for instance, Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's battle: the origins of humanitarian intervention* (New York, NY, 2008); Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim, eds., *Humanitarian intervention: a history* (Cambridge, 2011); Davide Rodogno, *Against massacre: humanitarian interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914: the emergence of a European concept and international practice* (Princeton, NJ, 2012); Michael N. Barnett, *Empire of humanity: a history of humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY, 2011); Keith David Watenpugh, *Bread from stones: the Middle East and the making of modern humanitarianism* (Oakland, CA, 2015); Jaclyn Granick, *International Jewish humanitarianism in the age of the Great War* (Cambridge, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> On the transformation of the Ottoman world from a 'Near' into a 'Middle' East, see Michelle Tusan, *Smyrna's ashes: humanitarianism, genocide, and the birth of the Middle East* (Berkeley, CA, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> See, most recently, David Sorkin, *Jewish emancipation: a history across five centuries* (Princeton, NJ, 2019); and on the Armenians, Ronald G. Suny, *'They can live in the desert, but nowhere else': a history of the Armenian genocide* (Princeton, NJ, 2015); and Donald Bloxham, *The great game of genocide: imperialism, nationalism, and the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *A world divided: the global struggle for human rights in the age of nation-states* (Princeton, NJ, 2019), pp. 159–205; Rogers Brubaker, 'Aftermaths of empire and the unmixing of

nineteenth century, indeed, the multiplication of anti-Semitic attacks on Jews in the Balkans and Russia (not to mention Western Europe itself) was matched by violence against the Armenians, which culminated in the ‘Hamidian’ massacres of the 1890s. In the face of persecution, both groups developed organizations pleading for guarantees of security and, at one end of the spectrum, national autonomy – as epitomized by the Zionist movement around Theodor Herzl and the Armenian parties established both within and outside the Ottoman Empire, from the Van-based *Armenakan* to the *Hay Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutiun* (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) founded in Tbilisi.<sup>8</sup>

As we argue in this article, however, the relationship between the Armenian and Jewish Questions ran deeper than ‘parallels’ and ‘convergences’ might suggest. Since the early nineteenth century at the latest, Western Europeans’ encounters with Armenians were viewed, to a great extent, through the lens of the Jews. ‘The Armenians are in Asia what the Jews are in Europe’, wrote Edmund Spencer, ‘dealers in silver and gold...and, like them, they form an entirely distinct race from the nations among whom they dwell, differing from them in religion...and also, like the tribes of Israel, their individuality as a people is marked in their physical conformation in characters which cannot be mistaken’.<sup>9</sup> Distinctiveness of religion, race, and nation, even physiognomy and occupation, appeared to connect the two diasporas. The public were thus introduced to a little-known ‘Eastern’ population by analogy with the minority they were most familiar with at home. As Stefan Ihrig has demonstrated, in an increasingly anti-Semitic Imperial Germany, the ‘conflation’ of Armenians with Jews fostered complacency towards the violence inflicted upon the subjects of the *Kaiserreich*’s Ottoman ally.<sup>10</sup> As we show here, in Britain and France too, though in different ways, attitudes to these two minorities developed in dialogue with one another, reflecting the changing cultural, political, and geopolitical environment of the period.

The roots of this dialogue lay in perceptions of the Ottoman Empire itself, where Jews and Armenians most obviously coincided and, alongside the Greeks, constituted the principal non-Muslim minorities. Depictions of all these groups displayed shades of Orientalism as a result, though the degree

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peoples: historical and comparative perspectives’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18 (1995), pp. 189–218, at p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> On the different aspirations of Armenian parties within the Ottoman Empire, see Gerard J. Libaridian, ‘What was revolutionary about Armenian revolutionary parties in the Ottoman Empire?’, in Fatma Göçek, Norman M. Neimark, and Ronald G. Suny, eds., *A question of genocide* (Oxford, 2011). The classic account of the movement is Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian revolutionary movement; the development of Armenian political parties through the nineteenth century* (Berkeley, CA, 1963). More recently, see Garabet K. Moundjian, ‘From Millet-i Sadika to Millet-i Asiya: Abdülhamid II and Armenians, 1878–1909’, in H. Yavuz and P. Sluglett, eds., *War and diplomacy: the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin* (Salt Lake City, UT, 2011), pp. 302–50; Toygun Altıntaş, ‘Crisis and (dis)order: Armenian revolutionaries and the Hamidian regime in the Ottoman Empire, 1887–1896’ (Ph.D. thesis, Chicago, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Edmund Spencer, *Travels in the Western Caucasus, including a tour through Imeritia, Mingrelia, Turkey, Moldavia, Galicia, Silesia, and Moravia, in 1836*, II (London, 1838), p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Stefan Ihrig, *Justifying genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), pp. 301–2, at p. 308.

of ‘otherness’ they claimed to demonstrate varied according to the time, place, and author of the observation.<sup>11</sup> There were clear differences between Jews and Armenians, of course, not least the factor of Christianity, but there was no linear connection between the latter’s faith and the support they received from the Western European public. As Jo Laycock has shown, not until the Genocide itself were Armenians metaphorically accepted into the European fold.<sup>12</sup> Like the ‘Orientalization’ of the Jews, the ‘Europeanization’ of the Armenians was full of twists and turns that reflected the evolving domestic and international situation, as well as the process of ‘minoritization’ which they were simultaneously undergoing.<sup>13</sup>

Between the two, lay the ever-present ‘Eastern Question’. The future of the Ottoman Sultan and Russian Tsar’s lands, particularly the Balkan and Caucasian regions that connected them – the ‘shatterzones’ of empire – loomed large in the British and French public sphere throughout the long nineteenth century, and directly affected the two diasporas.<sup>14</sup> The imperial convulsions of the period, moreover – from the Crimean to the Balkan and Russo-Turkish Wars – fed back into the Western European societies to which Jews and Armenians fled, and where they both (re)appeared as ‘immigrant’ minorities by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the period, therefore, attitudes to both groups fluctuated in accordance with the geopolitical developments of the time and the domestic situation in Britain and France.

The constant interaction and reshuffling of the discourses associated with Armenians and Jews remind us that the ‘questions’ they represented, as Holly Case has emphasized, were *formulations* – attempts by Western observers to distinguish and reassemble the individual elements in a broad matrix of domestic and international issues that concerned them.<sup>16</sup> The Eastern,

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Anderson, for instance, shows how Muslims could, in the German context, appear closer than Armenian Christians or Jews. See Margaret L. Anderson, “‘Down in Turkey, far away’”: human rights, the Armenian massacres, and Orientalism in Wilhelmine Germany’, *Journal of Modern History*, 79 (2007), pp. 80–111.

<sup>12</sup> Joanne Laycock, *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, ambiguity and intervention, 1879–1925* (Manchester, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Janet Klein, ‘Making minorities in the Eurasian borderlands’, in Krista A. Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, eds., *Empire and belonging in the Eurasian borderlands* (Ithaca, NY, 2019), pp. 17–32. See also Ivan D. Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews* (London, 2005); Julie Kalman, *Orientalizing the Jew: religion, culture and imperialism in nineteenth-century France* (Bloomington, IN, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz, *Shatterzones of empire: coexistence and violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman borderlands* (Bloomington, IN, 2013). The classic overview of the Eastern Question remains M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: a study in international relations* (London, 1966). More recently, see Jacques Frémeaux, *La question d’Orient* (Paris, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> For a comparative study of the integration of Armenians and Jews in twentieth-century France, see Maud Mandel, *In the aftermath of genocide: Armenians and Jews in twentieth-century France* (Durham, NC, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Holly Case, *The age of questions* (Princeton, NJ, 2018). See also Michael Galchinsky, ‘Africans, Indians, Arabs, and Scots: Jewish and other questions in the age of empire’, in Bryan Cheyette and Nadia Valman, eds., *The image of the Jew in European liberal culture, 1789–1914* (London, 2004),

Jewish, and Armenian Questions drew on a similar vocabulary, but their grammar was distinct. Throughout, however, the perceived connections between the Armenian and Jewish peoples repeatedly resurfaced, such that attitudes towards one often implied a particular perspective on the other. Examining the interplay between these discourses, therefore, allows us to recover the varied and variable connections that contemporaries established between domestic and international as well as socio-cultural and political issues during the 'age of questions'. It allows us to resituate the origins of the humanitarian and genocidal discourse that later tragically united Jews and Armenians in their historical, nineteenth-century context.<sup>17</sup>

Our analysis begins in the 1830s, when a recent Russo-Turkish conflict, the conclusion of the Greek Revolution, and the growing power of the Sultan's unruly subordinate in Egypt, Mehmet Ali, focused the attention of the British and French public on the fate of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>18</sup> The Great Powers' involvement in Ottoman affairs had long been justified as a defence of the Empire's non-Muslim, and particularly Christian, minorities, but there was as yet no distinct 'Armenian Question'. At the time, indeed, the Armenian presence in Western Europe itself was rather limited, beyond the small communities in centres of burgeoning trade with the Ottoman Empire, such as Manchester and Marseilles.<sup>19</sup> Debates on the civic and political rights of Jews, by contrast, were raging, as the final barriers to their full participation in British and French national life were being removed.<sup>20</sup> The process of Jewish 'emancipation' in Europe has received considerable attention from historians, and its connection to the movement for the protection of Ottoman Jews has more recently been recovered.<sup>21</sup> The focus of this article, therefore, will be on the lesser-known position of the Armenians in the Western imagination. As we will show, however, the two were fundamentally connected, and it was often by association with the Jews that the Armenians were transformed from a distant people into a humanitarian subject.

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pp. 46–60; Ari Joskowicz, 'Jews and other others', in Abigail Green and Simon Levis Sullam, eds., *Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism: a global history* (Cham, 2021), pp. 69–93.

<sup>17</sup> Abigail Green, 'Humanitarianism in nineteenth-century context: religious, gendered, national', *Historical Journal*, 57 (2014), pp. 1157–75.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Caquet, *The Orient, the liberal movement, and the Eastern Crisis of 1839–1841* (Basingstoke, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Joan George, *Merchants in exile: the Armenians in Manchester, England, 1835–1935* (Princeton, NJ, 2002). For a broad overview of Armenian history and of their early modern networks, see, respectively: Rasmik Panossian, *The Armenians: from kings and priests to merchants and commissars* (New York, NY, 2006); and Sebouh David Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: the global trade networks of Armenian merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, CA, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English literature and society: racial representations, 1875–1945* (Cambridge, 1993); David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: social relations and political culture, 1840–1914* (New Haven, CT, 1994); Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley, CA, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> On the merging of imperial interests and the protection of the Jews, see Abigail Green, 'The British empire and the Jews: an imperialism of human rights?', *Past & Present*, 199 (2008), pp. 175–205.

Freshly returned from his travels to a newly independent Greece in 1832, the young British essayist William Rathbone Greg set out to describe the 'present condition and future prospects of the Turkish Empire'. Many others had done so before him, and many more would follow, but the debate on the viability of the Ottoman state had recently intensified in light of the Great Powers' intervention in the region. Particularly noteworthy, according to Rathbone Greg, was the evident rift between the ruling class of 'Turks' and their subject 'conquered tribes'. Among the latter were Greeks, Armenians, and Jews, peoples who were 'mindful of their ancient freedom, indisposed to the iron and capricious rule of their oppressors, and as superior to them in activity and intelligence as in numerical amount'.<sup>22</sup> The Ottoman Empire's oppressed, non-Muslim minorities, as a growing chorus of European voices claimed, were a potential source of vitality in a state otherwise deemed 'peculiarly calculated to...generate its own decay'.<sup>23</sup>

Concern for the 'regeneration' of the Near East came from numerous quarters during the first half of the nineteenth century. In Britain, the suffusion of public discourse with biblical imagery fuelled enthusiasm for engagement with the Holy Land among Christian Zionists and Romantic Restorationists alike.<sup>24</sup> In France, Chateaubriand's interest in the region exemplified a conservative social stratum's nostalgia for a pre-revolutionary world, and the possibility of revivifying modern Catholicism by returning to its earliest roots.<sup>25</sup> A more forward-looking perspective, epitomized by the Saint-Simonians, saw in the Ottoman Empire both the traces of ancient civilization and an Oriental spirituality that could fruitfully be combined with the West's material progress.<sup>26</sup> Imperial ambitions always lurked in the background, of course, but their influence on these discourses was not straightforward.<sup>27</sup>

The Greek Revolution of the 1820s had brought this mixture of interests to the fore. Calling upon the Great Powers to support a resurgent nation's struggle against the Ottoman Empire, the standard-bearers of the European philhellenic movement, from Byron to Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, and Benjamin Constant, had spotlighted the Greeks' antiquity, Christianity, and

<sup>22</sup> William Rathbone Greg, *Sketches in Greece and Turkey: with the present condition and prospects of the Turkish Empire* (London, 1833), p. 245.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246; Alex Middleton, 'William Rathbone Greg, scientific liberalism, and the Second Empire', *Modern Intellectual History* (2021), pp. 1–27.

<sup>24</sup> Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English culture: Palestine and the question of Orientalism* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> C. W. Thompson, *French Romantic travel writing: Chateaubriand to Nerval* (Oxford, 2012); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the present: modern time and the melancholy of history* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> See Magali Morsy, ed., *Les Saint-Simoniens et l'Orient: vers la modernité* (Aix-en-Provence, 1989); Osama W. Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of modernity: Saint-Simonians and the civilizing mission in Algeria* (Stanford, CA, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli, the East, and religion: Tancred in context', *English Historical Review*, 132 (2017), pp. 570–604. On the complexity of British attitudes towards the region in the early nineteenth century, see Jonathan Parry, *Promised lands: the British and the Ottoman Middle East* (Princeton, NJ, 2022).

humanity.<sup>28</sup> The response they generated from the Concert of Europe is often cited as the first major instance of Western humanitarian intervention, but it also appeared to reflect a targeted concern for the Sultan's Christian subjects that would inevitably sideline the Jews over the following decades. It strengthened an asymmetry of empathy that was highlighted by the Damascus Affair of 1840, when Christians in Syria attacked Jews whom they accused of ritual murder, to which the British and French governments responded only after considerable activism by prominent representatives of their own Jewish communities.<sup>29</sup> When it came to the Ottoman Empire, the *Archives israélites de France* explained, '[t]he Christian states are concerned with the Christian Rayas...but who concerns themselves for the Jew? Who defends him? Nobody.'<sup>30</sup>

Christianity alone did not determine Western observers' interest in the Ottoman Empire's minorities, however. During Alphonse de Lamartine's voyage to the East during the 1830s, which had arguably triggered his own crisis of faith, he spotlighted in equal measure the 'Greek, Armenian, Maronite and Jewish populations' as 'hardworking, cultivating and mercantile' and therefore 'ripe' for the great changes that could be brought to the East.<sup>31</sup> Together with Rathbone Greg, Lamartine evoked a utilitarian vision of the Orient's revival that depended upon the ability of the minorities in question to 'improve' themselves. Thus, *The Times* distinguished between the Greeks, who had fought for their own liberty, and the Armenians, who 'tacitly submit[ted], like the Jews, to occupy a degraded position as a people'.<sup>32</sup> The implied hierarchy of potential remained flexible and adaptable. For the Scottish publisher John Reid, whilst the Jews were 'looked upon, and look[ed] upon themselves, as strangers' and the Greeks were 'feared on account of their unbroken spirit... the Armenian seem[ed] to have lost all feeling of political independence, and appear[ed] satisfied to remain a contented subject of the last power that conquered him'.<sup>33</sup>

By the time Reid was writing, abstract reflections on the future of the Ottoman state and its inhabitants had gained more concrete relevance. In 1839, Sultan Abdulhamid had announced a range of reforms for the Empire, including the introduction of equality for all his subjects, regardless

<sup>28</sup> For a recent discussion, see Mark Mazower, *The Greek Revolution: 1821 and the making of modern Europe* (London, 2021), pp. 326–47; François-René Chateaubriand, *Note sur la Grèce* (Paris, 1825); Benjamin Constant, *Appel aux nations chrétiennes en faveur des Grecs* (Paris, 1825); David E. Roessel, *In Byron's shadow: modern Greece in the English and American imagination* (Oxford, 2002); William St Clair, *That Greece might still be free: the philhellenes in the War of Independence*, ed. Roderick Beaton (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: 'ritual murder', politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge, 1997); Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore: Jewish liberator, imperial hero* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), pp. 133–57.

<sup>30</sup> *Archives israélites de France*, 1 Mar. 1841.

<sup>31</sup> *Oeuvres de M. de Lamartine: voyage en Orient, tome quatrième* (1849), p. 363. See also Thompson, *French Romantic travel writing*, pp. 112–13.

<sup>32</sup> *Times*, 9 Sept. 1835

<sup>33</sup> John Reid, *Turkey and the Turks: being the present state of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1840), p. 122.



of faith – initiating the so-called ‘Tanzimat’ era.<sup>34</sup> To Western powers, this suggested a possible shift in foreign policy, towards a clearer defence of the Ottomans’ efforts to ‘modernize’ or ‘regenerate’ themselves. But from this perspective, the non-Muslim minorities’ ongoing defence of their customs and privileges represented an obstacle to, rather than a source of, progress. Some writers, for instance, denounced the unprincipled, unpolitical pursuit of money that, in terms reminiscent of European anti-Semitism, they depicted as parasitical. ‘The Jew is even different’, Reid wrote, ‘for he cherishes two ideas – that of returning to his country, and the accumulation of wealth. The Armenian has but one wish to gratify, and that is the accumulation of wealth.’<sup>35</sup> The accusation was frequently levelled at the Armenian *sarafs*, or bankers, in particular, whom *Le Constitutionnel* described as the ‘plague of the empire’, who ‘corrupt[ed] the ‘natural goodness of the Turks’.<sup>36</sup> The view found popular resonance in the oft-repeated and modified proverb that ‘a Greek can cheat a Turk; a Jew will cozen a Greek; but an Armenian will trick not only a Jew, but *Schaitan* (the devil) himself; and where an Armenian is, a Jew must starve’.<sup>37</sup>

Notwithstanding the favourable treatment that the Jewish community believed the West was showing towards its preferred minorities, the Armenians’ Christianity was often itself the cause of their ambiguous – at times even hostile – reception in the British and French public spheres. In the Russophobic atmosphere of the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, their (erroneous) association with Orthodoxy raised suspicions that they could act as an arm of Russian expansion into the Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup> Doctrinal divergences, meanwhile, formed a central concern for the Protestant and Catholic missionaries who flocked to the Ottoman Empire by the 1840s, seeking to correct the ‘errors’ of Eastern Christianity. An excess of superstition among the Armenians was frequently denounced, for example, as were the ‘ignorance’ and drunkenness of their clergy.<sup>39</sup>

Similar criticisms were arguably directed at many of the region’s Christian denominations, but the perceived decadence of the Armenian church was also

<sup>34</sup> The classic overview of these reforms is Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1876* (Princeton, NJ, 1963).

<sup>35</sup> Reid, *Turkey and the Turks*, p. 123.

<sup>36</sup> *Le Constitutionnel*, 30 Apr. 1840; *ibid.*, 29 Jan. 1840. See also David Vinson, *Les Arméniens dans les récits des voyageurs français du XIXe siècle (1796–1895)* (Valence, 2004), pp. 129–40.

<sup>37</sup> Spencer, *Travels*, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> For a survey of the Armenian Church’s history and principles, see Hratch Tchilingirian, *The Armenian Church: a brief introduction* (Burbank, CA, 2008). On the complex relations between the Armenians and the Russian authorities, see Stephen Badalyan Riegg, *Russia’s entangled embrace: the Tsarist Empire and the Armenians, 1801–1914* (Ithaca, NY, 2020); and George A. Bournoutian, *Russia and the Armenians of Transcaucasia, 1797–1889: a documentary record* (Costa Mesa, CA, 1998). As early as 1834, *Le Constitutionnel* reported that ‘Across the entire Orient, in all of Asia, we met Russian agents and thousands of Armenians who, in their capacity of traders and ambulant merchants, traversed the country to favour the intrigues of Russia.’ This was also the stance taken by David Urquhart’s Russophobic publications: see ‘Observations on the Armenians’, in *The Portfolio; or, A collection of state papers*, IV (London, 1836), pp. 336–42.

<sup>39</sup> Vinson, *Les Arméniens dans les récits des voyageurs français*, pp. 188–202. See, for example, Victor Fontanier, *Voyages en Orient. De l’année 1821 à l’année 1829. Turquie d’Asie* (Paris, 1829), p. 174.



attributed to its rootedness in the Near East, underdevelopment, and continued proximity to Judaism in particular. 'In the domestic manners of the Armenians', John Reid claimed, 'there is much yet remaining of the old patriarchal system of the Jews: their fasts, feasts, and festivals, are all calculated from the setting of the sun; whilst their eating, drinking, and primitive general behaviour reminds one of the times of Jacob and Rachel'.<sup>40</sup> Even the prestigious *Revue des deux mondes* spoke of 'the contact of their primitive civilization with the religions of Asia, with the beliefs of Persia and Judaism...the Armenians still remember the enumeration which the Hebraic legislator gave [of impure meat] in the verses of Leviticus'.<sup>41</sup> In tracing the roots of the Armenians among the sons of Noah, meanwhile, most observers agreed that their ancestor was Japhet, but others believed the name 'Aram' tied them to the descendants of Shem.<sup>42</sup> Tenuous as these connections were, amid a new wave of interest in the 'Lost Tribes' of Israel, the Armenians offered a plausible line of inquiry.<sup>43</sup>

The roots of the Armenian and Jewish faiths thus seemed historically intertwined in Oriental soil. But to the French Catholic missionary Eugène Boré, their destinies were also theologically connected. Noting the Armenian people's dispersal 'from the depths of India to the centre of Poland...this trait of resemblance with the Jewish people, with which it partly shares its miseries', Boré asked: 'Why this conformity of fate? Had [this people] also rendered itself guilty of some prevarication which required a severe expiation?'<sup>44</sup> His answer, in the affirmative, echoed the belief expressed by some of his contemporaries in the British parliament that exile and diaspora were punishment for the Jews' refusal to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah.<sup>45</sup> To the Jews' crime of 'deicide', Boré juxtaposed the Armenians' 'defection from the centre of the Universal Church'.<sup>46</sup>

Whilst both diasporas were purportedly paying for the sins of their ancestors, the Armenians, as Boré had implied, possessed a path to redemption through Catholicism. 'Separation from Rome deprives the Armenian nation of powerful support', *The Tablet* reported,

[t]he Armenians are, like the Jews, a nation...a large family which is perpetuated, and continues to increase, by a tenacious spirit of nationality and indomitable perseverance...what influence they would obtain in a little time if their union with the West took place. The religious movement would favour the commercial; their political influence would be increased by the impulse the nation would receive from participating in the great work now carried on in the heart of the West.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Reid, *Turkey and the Turks*, p. 123.

<sup>41</sup> Hippolyte Desprez, 'L'Église d'Orient', *Revue des deux mondes*, 4 (1853), p. 853.

<sup>42</sup> *The ancient history of the Jews, and of the minor nations of antiquity, etc.* (London, 1834), p. 556.

<sup>43</sup> Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The ten lost tribes: a world history* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Eugène Boré, *Correspondance et memoires d'un voyageur en Orient* (Paris, 1840), p. 76.

<sup>45</sup> Polly Pinsky, 'English opinion and Jewish emancipation (1830–1860)', *Jewish Social Studies*, 14 (1952), pp. 51–94.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>47</sup> *Tablet*, 15 Oct. 1853.

The way to such a rapprochement had been facilitated by the establishment in 1830 of a Catholic Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople, but as *The Times* noted it had also ‘divided the Armenians into two almost distinct nations’, and denominational disputes would only multiply with the parallel growth of the Protestant congregation.<sup>48</sup> Other connections existed through the Mekhitarist convent in Venice, an Armenian order of monks who recognized the authority of the pope and promoted the education of their compatriots in the West. The example was not lost on the *Archives israélites*, which argued that ‘[a]n establishment must be formed in a northern city of Europe in favour of the Jewish youth of Turkey. The Catholic Armenians have such an establishment in Venice; it is very useful to them.’<sup>49</sup>

A rift was thus imagined between irredeemably ‘Oriental’ Armenians and Jews, on the one hand, and Catholicized (or Protestant) Armenians, on the other. ‘The heretic is the pure Armenian’, John Reid asserted, ‘and the Catholic belongs to the mixed race. The first adhere, with a peculiar tenacity, to their old Asiatic habits, while the second accord as much as possible to the ideas of western Europe.’<sup>50</sup> It was on this basis that, during the 1850s, the geographer Victor-Amédée Barbié du Bocage advocated the emigration of Catholic Armenians to France’s new but floundering colony of Algeria. Although not framed as such, his text was effectively a proposed ‘solution’ to an as-yet undefined Armenian ‘question’: by giving this people a home in Algeria, they could revive the withering roots of their ‘nation’ whilst benefiting the French empire. The Armenians, he argued, would bring industriousness and an aptitude for commerce to Algeria, where, in exchange, they would find a new homeland with a familiar climate. For du Bocage, these Catholics practically formed a new, regenerated race: ‘their veins’, he asserted, ‘contain a portion of Judaic blood, mixed with the old Armenian blood’, ‘they take from the Jewish race their love of trade, but in them this love is tempered by Christianity and by a remarkable vivacity and energy’.<sup>51</sup>

Although knowledge of the Armenians in Britain and France remained limited by the mid-nineteenth century, it was thus often mediated through their association with the Jews. This brought the former closer to Europe, but it could also reinforce the perceived ‘Orientalness’ of the latter. In discussing the removal of Jewish disabilities in Britain, for instance, the MP James Wyld underscored the fact that their ‘exclusiveness’ as a nation was no ‘condemnation by Heaven’, but a mere ‘Eastern characteristic, which had been seen in full force among the Armenians, Bohemians...Parsees’.<sup>52</sup> Conversely, the progress of religious equality in the Ottoman Empire could be compared with the process of Jewish emancipation in Britain itself:

<sup>48</sup> *Times*, 14 Apr. 1830, p. 2; Miroslav Sedivy, ‘Austria’s role in the Constantinople Armenian Catholics Affair in 1828–1831’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 48 (2012), pp. 51–71.

<sup>49</sup> *Archives israélites de France*, 1 July 1841.

<sup>50</sup> The distinction is repeatedly evoked by the famous missionary Joseph Wolff, in *Researches and missionary labours among the Jews, Mohammedans, and other sects* (London, 1837).

<sup>51</sup> V. A. Barbié du Bocage, *De l’introduction des arméniens catholiques en Algérie* (Paris, 1855), p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> *Times*, 1 Feb. 1848.

We hear it confidently stated that the Turks are reformed, that barbarism is vanishing, that prejudice no longer exists...‘Look’, they say, ‘at the Greek and Armenian merchants. They live at Constantinople and give banquets to Pashas.’ As well might it be argued that Jews do not suffer from social prejudices in this country because Baron Rothschild dines with dukes.<sup>53</sup>

A discursive connection had been established between the two groups that would shape attitudes to the ‘Questions’ they represented.

## II

The decades spanning the Treaty of Paris (1856) and the Congress of Berlin (1878) witnessed the parallel ‘minoritization’ of Armenians and Jews in their respective contexts. In formal terms, they represented distinct ‘problems’ within the overarching Eastern Question that preoccupied the West, but in wider discourse, their underlying connections would come to the fore. The diplomatic outlook had initially seemed promising: in exchange for the support that Britain, France, and their allies had given the Ottoman Empire in its fight against Russia, the Sultan reaffirmed his commitment to domestic reform. He recognized ‘full liberty of worship’ in the autonomous Principalities of Serbia, Moldavia, and Wallachia, and reiterated his desire to ‘ameliorate’ the conditions of all Ottoman subjects, ‘regardless of race or religion’. There were hopes for religious equality in Britain too, as the final obstacles to Jewish political emancipation were removed in 1858 – a process completed earlier in metropolitan France – and thus West and East appeared to be moving in step towards a new liberal order.<sup>54</sup> Citizenship would be blind to religious faith, allowing both Jews and Armenians to enjoy equal rights with their compatriots, whether French, British, or Ottoman.

Caught up in the spirit of the times, the Jewish publicist Isidore Cahen wrote in the prominent newspaper *La Presse* to justify the extension of political rights to the Armenians in the Balkans, where they had historically faced similar discrimination to the Jews.<sup>55</sup> Cahen was responding to recent reports of anti-Armenian ‘hatred’ in the local press, and the potential exclusion of Armenians from citizenship in the forthcoming constitution of Moldavia. Recognizing the plight of a fellow minority, he emphasized the ‘patriotism’ that they had ceaselessly displayed ‘wherever they have settled’, their historical roots in the region as ‘natives (*indigènes*)’, and their efforts to integrate society by teaching Romanian in their schools. The journalist also supported the extension of equal rights to the Balkan ‘Israelites’ – not as a Jew, but in keeping with the principles of ‘1789’ and ‘equality for all’. ‘We are not

<sup>53</sup> ‘ANGLICANUS’, *Times*, 27 June 1853.

<sup>54</sup> The process was far more protracted in the French colony of Algeria: see Michael Brett, ‘Legislating for inequality in Algeria: the Senatus-Consulte of 14 July 1865’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 51 (1988), pp. 440–61.

<sup>55</sup> Constantin Iordachi, *Liberalism, constitutional nationalism, and minorities: the making of Romanian citizenship, c. 1750–1918* (Leiden, 2019), pp. 31–84.

preaching in favour of anybody', Cahen insisted, 'but for all Christians of all rites, Jews, Muslims, etc.'<sup>56</sup>

The French revolutionary register of universalism and secularism foreshadowed the discourse of humanitarianism that would later develop, but it had to contend with the national and religious ground on which the liberal order was being established. Writing in *Le Siècle*, Cahen's colleague Louis Jourdan responded to a series of articles written by the editor of the *Journal des débats*, who had called for an 'Oriental 89' to improve the condition of the Empire's Christians, specifically. Such demands were not enough, Jourdan emphasized, and were a reminder that the West likewise fell short of its proclaimed ideals: how could revolutionary change be expected of the Turks, he asked, when England still excluded Jews from its parliament? 'We speak a lot of civilization, but Europe is still so far from being civilized, that we ought not be surprised to see the Orient so backward.'<sup>57</sup> For Jourdan and Cahen, the defence of minorities abroad held up a mirror to their ongoing discrimination at home.

Alongside religion, the liberal, rights-based order faced a further challenge in the 'principle of nationality', which had gained public support during the Greek War, and for which enthusiasm had grown since the revolutions of 1848.<sup>58</sup> During the following decade, Lord Palmerston and Napoleon III were similarly to trumpet (albeit selectively) the defence of national rights as a core axiom of international relations. In the Ottoman Empire's European principalities, Serbian and Romanian nationalism were on the ascendant, but in reaction to the experience of Muslim rule, both were increasingly defined in explicitly Christian terms, establishing religious barriers to citizenship.<sup>59</sup> The reverse situation prevailed in the Ottoman heartland: there, religious diversity had long been tolerated, but the religious *millets* around which the Empire's faith communities coalesced were increasingly depicted as 'nationalities' that might jeopardize efforts to create an all-encompassing Ottoman identity.<sup>60</sup> Whilst Jews faced exclusion in the principalities on religious grounds, it was the perception of Armenians as a quasi-national community that would threaten their position in the Ottoman Empire. The two minorities were going their separate ways.

Indeed, in 1858, the constitution adopted by the united Danubian Provinces defined citizenship in broad Christian terms, drawing Armenians into the fold, but excluding the Jews.<sup>61</sup> Increasingly, the attention of an emerging 'Jewish

<sup>56</sup> *La Presse*, 29 July 1857.

<sup>57</sup> *Le Siècle*, 21 June 1858.

<sup>58</sup> Georgios Varouxakis, '1848 and British political thought on "the principle of nationality"', in D. Moggach and G. Stedman Jones, eds., *The 1848 revolutions and European political thought* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 140–61.

<sup>59</sup> Lisa Moses Leff, 'Liberalism and Antisemitism: a reassessment from the peripheries', in Green and Levis Sullam, eds., *Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism*, pp. 23–45.

<sup>60</sup> James MacDougall, 'Sovereignty, governance, and political community in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa', in Joanna Innes and Mark Philp, eds., *Re-imagining democracy in the Mediterranean, 1780–1860* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 127–52.

<sup>61</sup> Years later, when a new wave of anti-Semitism swept across Romania, the *Archives israélites* would denounce the perceived opportunism of the Armenians who 'with all the zeal of the

international', led by Moses Montefiore in Britain and Adolphe Crémieux in France, and formalized in the *Alliance israélite universelle*, would turn to the Balkans where the most serious abuses against Jews called for redress.<sup>62</sup> In the Ottoman Empire itself, on the other hand, Jews appeared to represent something of a 'model millet', well integrated into the reformed supra-religious state – as Julia Philips Cohen has suggested, if anything, they were to suffer from an 'invisibility problem' in Western public opinion.<sup>63</sup>

The Armenians, meanwhile, seemed destined to form a part of that broad community of Eastern Christians for whom the Great Powers had shown especial solicitude.<sup>64</sup> Over the following decades, diplomatic intervention on behalf of Eastern Christians intensified, driven in part by growing public activism in the form of organizations such as the *Oeuvre pour les chrétiens d'Orient*.<sup>65</sup> The conjunction of these efforts was epitomized by the response to the Syrian massacres of 1860/1, when French-led international intervention on behalf of the Maronite Christians led to the creation of a quasi-autonomous Lebanese territory.

As we have seen, however, the Armenians had always constituted more than a religious community in Western eyes – not least through their association with the Jews. On the ground, as a number of historians have shown, relations between the Armenian clergy, the community's secular representatives, and the Ottoman state were complex.<sup>66</sup> But to Westerners, the granting of a 'constitution' to the Armenian community in the 1860s, transferring more power from the Patriarch to lay elites, looked rather suspiciously like a step towards 'national' autonomy, on the path previously followed by the Balkan states.<sup>67</sup> Over the following years, the British and French press would increasingly refer to the Armenians' rediscovery of their ancient 'nationality' and their political capacity for self-rule. The *Journal des débats*, for example, celebrated the community's experiment with 'democracy', and when the Orientalist Victor

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neophytes, are now the first to decry the invasion of the Jews and to proclaim the Fatherland in danger'. *Archives israélites de France*, 15 Feb. 1877.

<sup>62</sup> Abigail Green and Vincent Viaene, eds., *Religious internationals in the modern world: globalization and faith communities since 1750* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 53–81.

<sup>63</sup> Julia Philips Cohen, 'A model millet? Ottoman Jewish citizenship at the end of empire', in Green and Levis Sullam, eds., *Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism*, pp. 209–32; Julia Philips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and imperial citizenship in the modern era* (Oxford, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> The Treaty of Paris itself had singled out the Sultan's concern for the welfare of his Christian subjects, despite the efforts of Jewish activists to obtain a more inclusive statement: Elyahu Feldman, 'The question of Jewish emancipation in the Ottoman Empire and the Danubian Principalities after the Crimean War', *Jewish Social Studies*, 41 (1979), pp. 41–74.

<sup>65</sup> Nathan Jobert, 'L'Œuvre d'Orient et l'invention de la tradition française de protection des chrétiens d'Orient', *Les Cahiers d'EMAM* (online), 32 (2020).

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, Richard E. Antaramian, *Brokers of faith, brokers of empire: Armenians and the politics of reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA, 2020); Gerard Libaridian, 'Nation and fatherland in nineteenth-century Armenian political thought', in *Modern Armenia* (online resource, 2017), pp. 51–71; Altıntaş, 'Crisis and (dis)order: Armenian revolutionaries and the Hamidian regime'.

<sup>67</sup> Indeed, it has frequently been portrayed as such, in the standard narrative of Armenia's national 'awakening'.

Langlois visited Zeitun in 1862, the community was labelled an Armenian 'republic' in Turkish territory.<sup>68</sup>

The boundaries between religion and nation nevertheless remained blurred in public discourse. For some, the Sultan's reforms displayed a tolerance for 'nationality', which was contrasted with the Tsar's efforts to 'Russianize' his imperial periphery.<sup>69</sup> Others, on the contrary, believed that Russia's recognition of the 'principle of nationality' threatened to draw the Armenians, like the Romanians, into the Tsar's protection.<sup>70</sup> Michel Chevalier projected his own visions onto the concept of the religious '*millet*' when, in supporting the extension of French citizenship to Muslims and Jews in Algeria, he pointed to the successful 'fusing' of 'nationalities' in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, when the British Liberal MP Austen Layard was criticized for supporting Italian nationalists but not Ottoman Christians, he asserted that whilst the Italians shared a language and culture, the Christians of Turkey were a collection of races and creeds.<sup>72</sup>

There was ample space, therefore, for the ingrained associations between Armenians and Jews to re-emerge. When visiting Eastern Anatolia in the late 1860s, the conservative diplomat and 'phil-Ottoman' Gifford W. Palgrave described the Armenians as

[a] race more retentive than the Jews themselves of their nationality; more retentive of their money too, and more acquisitive. 'Shut up all the Jews and all the Armenians of the world together in one Exchange', old Rothschild is reported to have said, 'and within half an hour the total wealth of the former will have passed into the hands of the latter.' We believe it!<sup>73</sup>

The stereotype evoked by Palgrave – himself in fact of Jewish heritage – was well-worn, but its association with the 'retention' of nationality brought together the issues of Jewish and Armenian integration into their 'host' societies.<sup>74</sup> In a pointed comparison of the Armenians to the Jews of medieval Europe, he implied that, like their Hebrew counterparts, they would never fully assimilate.

Palgrave's text also revealed a deeper concern. Superficially, he too praised the Turks who, 'unlike the Russians, have never set themselves to the task of stamping out the nationalities they have conquered'. '[W]hile the Poles are

<sup>68</sup> *Journal des débats*, 8 Oct. 1867; Victor Langlois, 'Les Arméniens de la Turquie et les massacres du Taurus', *Revue des deux mondes*, 43 (1863), pp. 960–91. See also a description of the 'Republic of Zeithun', *Spectator*, 26 Aug. 1865, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> On the Ottoman Empire as tolerant of nationality, see, for example, *Times*, 4 Apr. 1861.

<sup>70</sup> *Times*, 12 Jan. 1859.

<sup>71</sup> *Le Constitutionnel*, 6 July 1865.

<sup>72</sup> *Hansard*, HC Deb. vol. 171, col. 106, 29 May 1863.

<sup>73</sup> William Gifford Palgrave, 'Eastern Christians', in *Essays on Eastern Questions* (London, 1872), p. 183.

<sup>74</sup> He was the son of the scholar Sir Francis Palgrave (originally Cohen); Mea Allan, *Palgrave of Arabia; the life of William Gifford Palgrave, 1826–1888* (London, 1972).

being proselytized into Russians by the knout and the mine', he wrote, 'the Armenians, under centuries of Turkish rule, remain unchanged, body, mind, religion, usages, and even institutions'. The 'unchangeability' of the Armenian, however, was also clearly an intrinsic problem in Palgrave's mind. 'Here comes one before us', he continued,

whether he be from Erzeroum, Kutahaia, or Aleppo matters little. All have the same strong, heavy build; the same thick beetle eyebrows; the full aquiline nose, springing directly, and without the intervention of any appreciable depression, from under the forehead, the same dark lustreless eye...the same large brown hand, and written in each curved finger tip, in every line of the capacious palm, the same.<sup>75</sup>

The physical and moral qualities of the Armenian, it appeared, were pre-determined, their 'retentiveness' an expression of an immutable genetic constitution.

Indeed, during the final decades of the nineteenth century, race became a further category with which to argue the merits of the Armenian and Jewish causes. The term itself had been widespread in earlier decades, but its scientization during the 1850s established a distinction between 'Aryans', 'Semites', and 'Turanians'.<sup>76</sup> Ernest Renan was among the first scholars to designate the Armenians as part of the first group, separating them from the Jews and Turks among whom they lived, a categorization that could be used to foreground their affinities to Europe.<sup>77</sup> But the debate was by no means settled, not least because language and biology remained contenders in the definition of race.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, a variety of manoeuvres were needed to reconcile race with early biblical and historical arguments for the common roots of the two peoples. Had an Aryan Armenia merely 'cradled the Shemites', for instance, as one reviewer of Renan's work suggested?<sup>79</sup> Or ought it be conceded, following Elisée Reclus in his *Géographie universelle*, that 'the Semitic element played a large part in the formation of the Haik race'?<sup>80</sup>

By the early 1870s, reports of abuses against Balkan Jews and Ottoman Armenians portended the 'Great Eastern Crisis' that was to unite their fates, if not their causes. The struggles for Serbian and Bulgarian independence that launched the crisis in 1875 drew attention once again to the explosive

<sup>75</sup> Palgrave, 'Eastern Christians', p. 183.

<sup>76</sup> On the lesser-known Turanians, see Stéphanie Prévost, *Le Touran: entre mythes, Orientalisme et constructions identitaires* (Valenciennes, 2019). Like the term 'Aryan', Max Müller, together with his mentor Baron Bunsen, also introduced the term 'Turanian' to British discourse.

<sup>77</sup> Ernest Renan, *Histoire générale et systèmes comparés des langues sémitiques* (Paris, 1855).

<sup>78</sup> Freeman himself dealt with this in 1878; see Edward A. Freeman, 'Race and language', in *Historical Essays*, Third Series (London, 1879), pp. 173–230.

<sup>79</sup> Renan, *Histoire*; ART. I- 'Histoire generale et systemes compares des langues semitiques', *London Review*, 18 (July 1862), pp. 285–318, at p. 299.

<sup>80</sup> Elisée Reclus, *Nouvelle géographie universelle: la terre et les hommes*, VI (Paris, 1881), p. 263. As late as 1907, it was asserted that '[i]t is commonly believed that the Armenians are of absolute Semitic origin': Richard Davey, *The Sultan and his subjects* (London, 1897), p. 357.



potential of the 'principle of nationality' in the Balkans. The heavy-handed response of the Ottoman authorities, meanwhile, which triggered violence against all sections of the population, cast doubt over the possibility of reforming the Empire. If the accession of Sultan Abdulhamid and the promulgation of an Ottoman constitution in 1876 seemed to revive such hopes in the West, expectations were dashed when Russia took the opportunity to invade in 1877. As the Tsar's armies reached the gates of Constantinople, raising the spectre of the Ottoman Empire's dissolution, even this short-lived constitutional era came to a close.

In terms of human suffering, the effects of the crisis were extremely wide ranging, and stimulated the mobilization of faith communities across the globe.<sup>81</sup> The public response in the West, for its part, appeared to reassert a targeted concern for Christians, symbolized most prominently by Gladstone's tract on the 'Bulgarian Horrors', which denounced the massacres perpetrated by 'the Turk'.<sup>82</sup> Gladstone's text represented the rise of a strident, liberal-moral imperialism with clear Christian overtones in Britain, tacitly restricting the boundaries of belonging to the 'national' community – its counterpart was a growing domestic anti-Semitism, symptom of a reaction to Jewish emancipation.<sup>83</sup> During the crisis, the prime minister Disraeli was derided as a 'Jew' and 'Semite', whose 'Asiatic' affinity towards the Turks purportedly explained his defence of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>84</sup> 'We cannot', wrote Edward Freeman, 'sacrifice our people, the people of Aryan and Christian Europe, to the most genuine belief in an Asian mystery. We cannot have England or Europe governed by a Hebrew policy...Lord Beaconsfield is the active friend of the Turk.'<sup>85</sup>

The Congress of Berlin, organized by Bismarck in 1878 to resolve the multiple issues raised by the crisis, faced a mammoth task. In addition to the immediate causes and consequences of the Russo-Turkish War, the meeting of the Great Powers was seen as an opportunity to seek support for a wide range of causes. Memoranda from different groups were 'pouring down' on the Congress, one French newspaper stated: 'If the Congress wanted to, it

<sup>81</sup> Adrian Ruprecht, 'The Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878) as a global humanitarian moment', *Journal of Global History*, 16 (2021), pp. 159–84.

<sup>82</sup> William Ewart Gladstone, *Bulgarian horrors and the question of the East* (London, 1876).

<sup>83</sup> On the politics of the crisis in Britain, see Robert W. Seton-Watson, *Disraeli, Gladstone, and the Eastern Question* (London, 1935).

<sup>84</sup> Todd Endelman and Tony Kushner, eds., *Disraeli's Jewishness* (London, 2002); Anthony S. Wohl, "'Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi": Disraeli as alien', *Journal of British Studies*, 34 (1995), pp. 375–411.

<sup>85</sup> Edward A. Freeman, *The Ottoman power in Europe: its nature, its growth and its decline* (London, 1877), p. xix; David Cesarani, *Disraeli: the novel politician* (New Haven, CT, 2016), pp. 210–15; Oded Y. Steinberg, *Race, nation, history: Anglo-German thought in the Victorian era* (Philadelphia, PA, 2019), ch. 4; '[H]ad Britain been drawn into this conflict', the former Oxford don Goldwin Smith asserted, 'it would have been in some measure a Jewish War': Goldwin Smith, 'England's abandonment of the Protectorate of Turkey', *The Contemporary Review*, 31 (Feb. 1878), pp. 603–19, at p. 617; Goldwin Smith, 'Can Jews be patriots', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, 3 (May 1878), pp. 875–87. This essay was a response to an earlier essay with the same title written by the future chief Rabbi of the British empire, Rabbi Hermann Adler, claiming that the Jews were loyal subjects of the crown. See Hermann Adler, 'Can Jews be patriots?', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, 3 (Apr. 1878), pp. 637–46; Adler himself was responding to the above-mentioned essay by Smith.

would convene for another six months to pronounce on all these pretensions.<sup>86</sup> The Jews and Armenians duly presented their own demands to the Congress, backed up by prominent figures and associations. With the assistance of Bismarck's Jewish banker Gerson Bleichröder, the cause of the Balkan Jews presented by Adolphe Crémieux, Moses Montefiore and the *Alliance israélite universelle* was heard.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, Archbishop Khrimian and his secretary Minas Tcheraz toured Europe to gain recognition for the 'Armenian Question', obtaining the support of James Bryce, then Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford, and the small but growing diaspora in Manchester and London.<sup>88</sup>

France's participation in the Congress of Berlin was reduced to a position of neutrality. With a conservative government on the brink of collapse, the Third Republic was torn between *revanchisme* towards Germany and a desire to find a new place on the global stage in what one newspaper termed 'la première partition de la turquie'.<sup>89</sup> As a result, it has been argued, the French government had little to say on the Armenian Question, although the press still criticized Foreign Minister Waddington for defending the 'liberties' of Eastern European Jews whilst ignoring the Armenians and other Oriental Christians.<sup>90</sup> Public gatherings to rally behind these causes were held in tandem, such that on 5 July 1878, London played host to two simultaneous meetings: one at Westminster, to discuss the Armenian cause, another, organized by the Anglo-Jewish Association, to defend the claims of the Jews.<sup>91</sup>

Discussion of the two questions took place in parallel, but the underlying connections between them persisted, allowing the Jewish example to serve as a lens through which to interpret the Armenian case. Gifford Palgrave, for instance, predictably denounced Armenian claims to national autonomy, asking: 'Were the Jewish indwellers of any European State, of Germany, say, of France, of Russia, of England, to lay before Congress a claim to a "separate province", "autonomy", and so forth, would anyone be equally ready to back their petition?'<sup>92</sup> Downplaying the 'national' characteristics of the Armenians and emphasizing their status as a religious minority was a key conservative

<sup>86</sup> *Le Constitutionnel*, 1 July 1878.

<sup>87</sup> On the treatment of Romania and Serbia towards the Jews and the failed attempt to reform their condition through the Berlin Treaty, see Carole Fink, *Defending the rights of others: the Great Powers, the Jews, and international minority protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 3-38; Carol Iancu, 'Adolphe Crémieux, l'Alliance israélite universelle, et les Juifs de Roumanie au début du règne de Carol Hohenzollern Sigmaringen', *Revue des études juives*, 133 (1974), pp. 481-502; N. M. Gelber, 'The intervention of German Jews at the Berlin Congress 1878', *Year Book - Leo Baeck Institute*, 5 (1960), pp. 221-48.

<sup>88</sup> Arthur Beylerian, 'Les origines de la question arménienne du traité de San Stefano au Congrès de Berlin (1878)', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 1-2 (1973), pp. 139-71.

<sup>89</sup> Henry Laurens, *Les crises d'Orient, I: Question d'Orient et Grand Jeu (1768-1914)* (Paris, 2017); Paul Cambon, soon to become French ambassador in Constantinople, would later assert that the French had 'understood nothing' of the Armenian situation: Ministère des Affaires étrangères, *Documents diplomatiques: affaires arméniennes: projets de réformes dans l'Empire ottoman, 1893-1897* (Paris, 1897), p. 11.

<sup>90</sup> *Gazette de France*, 25 July 1878.

<sup>91</sup> *Newcastle Courant*, 5 July 1878.

<sup>92</sup> Gifford W. Palgrave, *Times*, 2 July 1878.

argument, for which the analogy with the Jews was helpful. An article in *The Globe* asserted that despite developments that had 'made the principle of nationality popular in Europe', the fact that there was a 'race called Armenians' did not automatically justify the demand for autonomy: 'the zealous enthusiasts in England who have taken the Armenian under their protection...do not acknowledge how small the minority is'.<sup>93</sup>

The impracticability of granting autonomy to the Armenians had been underscored by Foreign Minister Salisbury in an address to parliament before the Congress:

though undoubtedly the Armenians are a people of a separate faith, and – though the term cannot be applied with accuracy – they may also be regarded as constituting a separate nationality, yet they are so scattered about, and so mixed with the Turkish population, that either you must provide institutions applicable to Turks, Kurds, and Armenians, alike, or else you must have...several different institutions in the same locality.<sup>94</sup>

It was more realistic, from this perspective, to treat the Armenians as a religious group in a progressively secularizing Ottoman state, on the Western model. As the owner of *The Morning Post*, Algernon Borthwick, declared:

Politically, it is true that the Christian races have suffered from disabilities; but we must remember that it was only yesterday that we ourselves admitted the Jews to Parliament or removed the many disqualifications under which the Roman Catholics laboured...No doubt the political organisation of Turkey stood in need of serious and widespread reform; but that reform was needed as much for the sake of the Turk himself as of the Armenian, the Bulgarian, or the Bosnian.<sup>95</sup>

In keeping with existing foreign policy, conservative sections of the public argued for the continued reform and revival of the Ottoman state. Whatever the geopolitical considerations that supported such a policy, it was justified in terms of the strength or weakness of the Armenians' claims to a national or religious identity. One could not be 'dull to the practical facts of to-day', as an article in *The Quarterly Review* put it, criticizing those who advocated 'the necessity of kindling into artificial vitality the dead bones of Armenian nationality'.<sup>96</sup> 'Not even a Congress of plenipotentiaries', it was written elsewhere, 'can invest with national privileges a race that is destitute of national attributes...no people could be, either by nature or experience, more absolutely unqualified for the duties and responsibilities of national existence'. Again, the similarities with their Jewish counterparts served to reinforce their status as a religious minority: 'Like the Jews they are faithful to their creed...[but]

<sup>93</sup> 'Armenia and the Armenians', *The Globe*, 5 July 1878.

<sup>94</sup> *Hansard*, HL Deb. vol. 240, col. 1244, 6 June 1878.

<sup>95</sup> *Morning Post*, 11 Jan. 1878.

<sup>96</sup> 'The people of Turkey', *Quarterly Review*, July 1878.

they have for centuries been content to serve as pariahs...for the dominant races.<sup>97</sup>

Others disagreed, of course, and emphasized the practical differences between the two minorities. Palgrave's bitter rival, the Liberal James Bryce, and Lord Carnarvon, who had resigned as colonial secretary in opposition to the government's pro-Ottoman stance, highlighted the statistical distinction between the two cases:<sup>98</sup> 'Wherever 2,000,000 Jews, wealthy, prosperous, peace-loving...are collected in any district or province of the East, I should not be disposed to refuse them the privileges of self-government...I know no reason for withholding from Armenian or Jew what Europe is disposed to grant to Bulgarian or Greek.'<sup>99</sup> A concentrated minority, it seemed, possessed more clearly national qualities. *Le Temps* took Lord Salisbury to task for his comments in parliament, asserting that 'the dispersal of the Armenians has been but partial and that the great mass still occupies the land of the old homeland [*patrie*]'.<sup>100</sup>

Further evidence of the Armenians' greater claim to national autonomy was provided by returning to the issue of their historical rootedness in Eastern Anatolia: '[T]here is a Greece inhabited by Greeks, and an Armenia inhabited by Armenians', it was asserted in *The Saturday Review*, 'while there is no Judea inhabited by the Jews.'<sup>101</sup> The argument was to recur frequently over the following decades, depicting the Armenians as possessing a quasi-state in their homeland. Thus, James Creagh argued that:

The dispersion of the Armenians has been compared to that of the Jews; but, unlike the latter, the former are a nation with a home, towards which their eyes are constantly turned, in which their centre of political and religious life is nourished, and of which Echmiadzin is the capital, and the Patriarch or Catholicos the king.<sup>102</sup>

Demographic concentration and deep territorial connections thus appeared to distinguish the Armenians from the Jews, along with evidence of the political vitality of a nation ripe for 'self-government'.<sup>103</sup>

On paper, if not in practice, the Treaty of Berlin was a victory for the cause of religious liberty in the Balkans and a defeat for the Armenian 'national'

<sup>97</sup> *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 8 July 1878.

<sup>98</sup> The animosity between the two figures was personal: Palgrave depicted Bryce as a charlatan who possessed no real knowledge of 'Eastern' cultures and languages', whilst Bryce took comfort in hearing that his opponent '[lied] like a Pascha... he was found so untrustworthy in the East that he was sent to the West Indies'.

<sup>99</sup> Carnarvon, 'The Armenians', *Evening Mail*, 8 July 1878.

<sup>100</sup> *Le Temps*, 7 July 1878.

<sup>101</sup> 'The Jews in Europe', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 43 (1877), pp. 161–2.

<sup>102</sup> James Creagh, *Armenians, Koords and Turks*, 1 (London, 1880), p. 275.

<sup>103</sup> *Le Temps*, 13 July 1878. *La République française*, the organ of the firebrand Léon Gambetta, for instance, asserted that '[t]he Armenian population is intelligent, active, restless; it holds and supports itself with a remarkable spirit of solidarity; and, although Asiatic, it has imposed itself in Europe', *La République française*, 13 July 1878.

movement in the Ottoman Empire. Article 61, in particular, replaced earlier guarantees that Russia would supervise reform in the 'Armenian provinces', with a vague promise of international oversight. Over the following years, the introduction of these reforms would become the focus of the Armenian cause in the West. Lord Salisbury pursued his Conservative government's policy, insisting that there was 'no special responsibility upon Her Majesty's Government to see to them, certainly as far as the Armenian people are concerned'.<sup>104</sup> And yet, *The Spectator* claimed, the government seemed particularly active when it came to denouncing the continued persecution of Jews in the Balkans, withholding its ambassador from Bucharest whilst it 'pats the Porte upon the back, acknowledges that it cannot help itself, promises that it shall not be punished, whatever massacres it may tolerate'. '[I]n the existing circumstances of the British Ministry', the article concluded, 'the Jewish clauses of the Treaty of Berlin must be enforced, though the Christian clauses are only "stipulations"'.<sup>105</sup>

The asymmetry of attention devoted to different causes, as we have seen, was a recurring accusation. Here, the underlying anti-Semitism came quite clearly to the surface, *The Spectator* attributing this injustice to the fact that the victims were 'Jews, a race to which great personages, both in finance and politics, belong'.<sup>106</sup> As the focus shifted to the persecution of the Jews in Russia during the 1880s, in the pogroms that followed the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, the image would once again be reversed. During a debate in the British parliament, Gladstone was urged to respond to the pogroms just as he had reacted to the 'Bulgarian Horrors' of 1876. As the Jewish Conservative MP Baron Henry De Worms argued, this was 'a question not of one Party or of the other, but one which affects the humanity which is common to all'.<sup>107</sup> At stake were no longer the national and religious rights of two minorities, but their very existence.

### III

The 1890s brought an intensification of assaults on both Jews and Armenians, and with it a renewed international engagement with the 'Questions' they represented. The pogroms of the 1880s in Russia and the mass emigration they stimulated fed anti-Semitism in Western Europe, where the reception of Eastern Jews in London and the Dreyfus affair in France revealed that political emancipation had not led to social acceptance.<sup>108</sup> At the same time, a series of massacres was initiated in the Ottoman Empire in 1894 that, for two years, would target Armenian communities everywhere from Constantinople to Van, costing between 100,000 and 300,000 lives. In Britain first, and then

<sup>104</sup> 'Lord Salisbury on the Armenians and Jews', *Spectator*, 5 July 1879.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Hansard*, HC Deb. vol. 267, col. 31, 3 Mar. 1882.

<sup>108</sup> Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, *Paths of emancipation: Jews, states, and citizenship* (Princeton, NJ, 1995).

in France, activists, politicians, and the press voiced their anger and concern, both at the events themselves, and the muted response from their governments. Against the *Realpolitik* driving governments' relations with Russia and the Ottoman Empire, it seemed, was raised the voice of Western Europe's conscience in the face of a humanity outraged.<sup>109</sup>

The parallels between the two developments were evident to many contemporaries. Key figures such as Gladstone spoke out against the persecution of minorities in both empires, and the activism of Jean Jaurès, Georges Clemenceau, and others in support of the Armenian cause fuelled their defence of Dreyfus and denunciation of anti-Semitism in France.<sup>110</sup> Throughout, 'humanity' clearly played a central role, both in motivating and formulating efforts to speak out for oppressed minorities.<sup>111</sup> However, the invocation of a common humanity could not efface the profoundly connected ways in which public opinion had come to conceive of Armenians and Jews as national, religious, or racial groups. The mirror image of persecuted Jews in Eastern Europe and ostracized Armenians in the Ottoman Empire was strengthened during the 1890s. Indeed, the 400th anniversary of the expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 enhanced the image of the 'tolerant Turks' who had provided a refuge for them, just as the targeting of Armenians gathered pace.<sup>112</sup> Short of conducting a foreign policy based on humanitarianism alone, however, choices would have to be made, and addressing one 'Question' implied a particular response to the other.

Before the onset of the Hamidian massacres, the asymmetry of attention given to each cause was yet again denounced on both sides. 'Where does this especial solicitude for the Jews come from', read an article in *Le Constitutionnel*, 'whilst we don't concern ourselves with the Armenians, whom the Turkish government persecutes or allows to be persecuted, just as much as the Russian Israelites may be?'<sup>113</sup> The Tory-leaning, Russophobe *Blackwood's Magazine*, by contrast, asserted that:

Now it is the turn of the Russian Jews who seek to make their voices heard...In Turkey it is impossible for the Sultan to conceal for a week any detail concerning a single outrage by a Kurdish Brigand on an

<sup>109</sup> On the priority given to *Realpolitik*, see Rodogno, *Against massacre*. On the public response to the Hamidian Massacres, see Hamit Bozarslan, Vincent Duclert, and Raymond H. Kévorkian, 'L'Europe face aux grands massacres hamidiens: naissance d'une conscience humanitaire', in Hamit Bozarslan, Vincent Duclert, and Raymond H. Kévorkian, eds., *Comprendre le génocide des Arméniens* (Paris, 2015), pp. 255–72; Vincent Duclert and Gilles Pecout, 'La mobilisation intellectuelle face aux massacres d'Arménie', in André Gueslin and Dominique Kalifa, eds., *Les exclus en Europe, 1830–1930* (Paris, 1999), pp. 323–44; A. Kirakosian, *The Armenian massacres, 1894–1896: British media testimony* (Dearborn, MI, 2008).

<sup>110</sup> Vincent Duclert, *La France face au génocide des Arméniens du milieu du XIXe siècle à nos jours* (Paris, 2015).

<sup>111</sup> Emmanuel Naquet, 'Quelques défenseurs des droits de l'homme face à la cause arménienne (fin XIXe – début XXe siècles)', *Etudes arméniennes contemporaines*, 2 (2013), pp. 43–61.

<sup>112</sup> Marc David Baer, *Sultanic saviors and tolerant Turks: writing Ottoman Jewish history, denying the Armenian genocide* (Bloomington, IN, 2020).

<sup>113</sup> *Le Constitutionnel*, 2 June 1891.

Armenian peasant. Missionaries, journalists, travellers, and consuls hasten to spread the news. Bluebooks are published, Armenian committees organise meetings in London to protest.<sup>114</sup>

In formal terms, the difference between the two groups lay in the 'obligations' that the Great Powers had towards the Armenians by virtue of the Treaty of Berlin. This was the Liberal Edward Freeman's argument in denouncing a purportedly excessive focus on the plight of the Russian Jews: '[t]is no affair of ours', he wrote, 'we are not answerable as we are for Cretans, Armenians, and Macedonians'.<sup>115</sup> And whilst Freeman underscored the contractual agreements that favoured the Armenian cause, his underlying anti-Semitism was evident. 'I am fuming at all this Jew humbug', he wrote,

It is simply got up to call off our thoughts from Armenia and Crete. If I were to say that every nation has a right to wallop its own Jews I might be misunderstood, for I don't want to wallop anybody, even Jews. The best thing is to kick them out altogether, like King Edward Longshanks of famous memory. But I do say that if any nation chooses to wallop its own Jews 'tis no business of any other nation. Whereas if the Turk wallops Cretans and Armenians it is our business, because we have promised to make them do otherwise.<sup>116</sup>

From a Jewish perspective, the Treaty obligations towards the Armenians were merely the most recent formulation of a long-standing bias that denied them a 'privilege of appeal to another power', as Oswald J. Simon, a prominent member of the Anglo-Jewish Association, asserted: 'While the maltreatment of the Armenian Christians is every day denounced, and justly so, by tongue and pen, the oppression of Jews in Russia causes neither excitement nor protest'.<sup>117</sup> This concern was frequently expressed in the Jewish press, where readers were reminded of the continuing tensions between the two groups within the Ottoman Empire itself.<sup>118</sup> The *Archives israélites de France*, for instance, took the Ultramontane press to task for republishing blood-libel accusations, highlighting the 'fanaticism of the Armenian population' which was involved in these incidents.<sup>119</sup>

Nevertheless, news of the massacres perpetrated in Sasun during the summer of 1894 transformed the Armenian Question into one of the most pressing geopolitical issues of the time. Over the next few years, the press abounded with articles reporting on the intensifying cycle of violence in the Ottoman Empire, which culminated in the seizure of the Imperial Bank in Constantinople by Armenian revolutionaries, triggering violent reprisals.

<sup>114</sup> 'The Tsar and the Jews', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 148 (Oct. 1890), pp. 441–55.

<sup>115</sup> E. A. Freeman to Edith Thompson, 8 Feb. 1891, in W. R. W. Stephens, ed., *The life and letters of Edward A. Freeman*, II (London and New York, NY, 1895), p. 428.

<sup>116</sup> Letter on the expulsion of the Jews from Russia (c. 1891), *ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 17 July 1890.

<sup>118</sup> For example *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 Aug. 1890.

<sup>119</sup> *Archives israélites de France*, 22 May 1890.



British support for the Ottoman Empire, a core axiom of nineteenth-century geopolitics, received a major blow domestically, as reports of the atrocities generated public denunciation of the government's policies. 'The Turk begins to repress', the scholar David George Hogarth wrote at the height of the massacres, 'because we sympathize and we sympathize the more because he represses, and so the vicious circle revolves'.<sup>120</sup> Lord Rosebery, who had replaced the aging Gladstone in 1894, resigned his office in part due to the perceived neglect of Britain's Treaty obligations, although his successor, the conservative Salisbury, continued to advocate for negotiations with the Porte for immediate reforms.<sup>121</sup>

The French government was similarly reluctant to intervene directly, but the press was also initially more restrained in its criticism. So much so, in fact, that at the height of the crisis in 1896, newspaper editors were accused of being under the influence of the Sultan's agents.<sup>122</sup> The government itself initially deflected attention away from the humanitarian dimension of the massacres towards the British interests that purportedly lay behind them. The *Journal des débats* evoked the 'monstrous exaggerations' of the British press, and *La Croix* referred to the 'English intrigues' and purported attempt to create an 'English principality' in Armenia, even claiming that the 'insurrection' was being directed by a revolutionary committee based in London.<sup>123</sup> Over time, however, the contradictions between Foreign Minister Gabriel Hanotaux's policy of appeasement and the alarm expressed by his diplomats on the ground became evident.<sup>124</sup>

The Armenian Question finally burst onto the French public scene in November 1896, when, during an intense debate in the National Assembly, the socialist Jaurès joined the radical Clemenceau, the anarchist Pierre Quillard, and conservative Catholics Albert De Mun and Denys Cochin in decrying the 'outrages to humanity' and denouncing the government's inertia.<sup>125</sup> But the response was at times rather equivocal: '[T]he historian sympathizes (*s'attendrit*) with these great misfortunes', wrote the republican newspaper *Paris*, but 'the statesman is forced to account for the current situation and accomplished transformations. We cannot give Armenia back to the Armenians any more than we might hand back Persia to the Parsis or Judea to the Jews.'<sup>126</sup> Governments' *Realpolitik*-based decision not to intervene was once again justified in terms of the diasporic, 'a-national' quality of the two minorities.

<sup>120</sup> D. G. A. Hogarth, *Wandering scholar in the Levant* (London, 1896), p. 148.

<sup>121</sup> Roy Douglas, 'Britain and the Armenian Question, 1894–1897', *Historical Journal*, 19 (1976), pp. 113–33; Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, *The British empire and the Armenian genocide: humanitarianism and imperial politics from Gladstone to Churchill* (London, 2017).

<sup>122</sup> Duclert, *La France face au génocide des Arméniens*.

<sup>123</sup> *La Croix*, 30 Aug. 1896; *ibid.*, 12 Dec. 1894; *ibid.*, 25 Dec. 1894.

<sup>124</sup> Giancarlo Casà, 'Les massacres arméniens de 1895 à Diyarbekir à travers le témoignage du vice-consul Gustave Meyrier', *Études arméniennes contemporaines*, 8 (2016), pp. 91–118.

<sup>125</sup> Edmond Khayadjian, *Archag Tchobanian et le mouvement arménophile en France* (Alfortville, 2001).

<sup>126</sup> *Paris*, 13 Nov. 1896.

The similarities evoked between Jews and Armenians now took on a far more sinister tone, however. 'A race as tough as the Armenian takes a good deal of killing', wrote William T. Stead. 'The Armenian, we may depend upon it, may be harried and massacred, but he cannot be exterminated. He is as indestructible as the Jew.'<sup>127</sup> Particularly chilling, with hindsight, was the suggestion that the Sultan's attitude to the Armenians was in fact relatable. 'I have no love for the Armenian', wrote MP John Burns,

his Christianity is, in many instances, a cloak for crafty commercialism, his huckstering and usurious pursuits are incapable of defence. That he is the Jew of the East we know...The undue cultivation of the worst form of commercial spirit has evolved in the Armenian faculties that do not endear him to the Turk. We have the same thing under another name nearer home. The Jewification of the Armenian is in no small degree the cause of the recent troubles.<sup>128</sup>

Only reluctantly did Burns concede that such similarities were 'no excuse for persecution as a preliminary to extinction', and that the 'senseless slaughter of otherwise innocent, if undesirable people, must be stopped'.<sup>129</sup>

The visceral anti-Semitism that was projected onto the Armenians was even more flagrant in sections of the French press, although it was deployed for a variety of purposes. The Catholic newspaper *La Croix*, for instance, actually shifted responsibility for the massacres onto the Jews themselves, denouncing the 'abominable' role they had supposedly played in them, and recasting them as a modern-day 'Judas'.<sup>130</sup> Similar accusations could be heard in the Ultramontane *L'Univers*, but Edouard Drumont's *La Libre Parole*, as might be expected, took matters further. Adapting an older discourse on the historical rootedness of these minorities in the Orient, André de Boisandré wrote:

the Armenians are at home in his [the Sultan's] home; they are natives (*autochtones*), and he is the outsider, the conqueror; our Jews, on the contrary, are foreigners in our country: they are not even conquerors there, rather 'infiltrators' who have obtained their rights of settlement only by exploiting the naïve sentimentality of the people.<sup>131</sup>

*La Libre Parole* thus appeared to defend the Armenian cause, but primarily as a means to emphasize the 'foreignness' of French Jews.

De Boisandré was responding to a satirical pamphlet that purported to be a reply from the 'Grand Turk' to Georges Clemenceau's passionate defence of the

<sup>127</sup> William T. Stead, 'Abdul Hamid, Sultan of Turkey: a character sketch', *Review of Reviews*, 13 (1896), p. 47; see also Stéphanie Prévost, 'W. T. Stead and the Eastern Question (1875–1911); or, How to rouse England and why?', *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 19 (2013), p. 33.

<sup>128</sup> John Burns, 'The massacres in Turkey', *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, 40 (Oct. 1896), p. 667.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *La Croix*, 7 Nov. 1896.

<sup>131</sup> *La Libre Parole*, 10 Nov. 1896.

Armenians. ‘You’re not even logical’, the pamphlet told Clemenceau in a decidedly colloquial tone,

I see in your newspapers that those most outraged by the ‘Turkish atrocities’ are precisely the anti-Semites. The Armenians are our Jews...And see, here are some men who would like to enact a *Saint-Barthélemy* of Jews, and who won’t let us do a *Saint-Barthélemy* of Armenians. Do I ever prevent you from killing each other?<sup>132</sup>

The text, which proceeded to highlight French hypocrisy by enumerating the violent crimes being committed in its colonies, was in fact written by the prominent anti-Semite, Urbain Gohier. In a twisted way, Gohier sought to demonstrate that those defending ‘humanity’ were themselves applying their principles selectively – the anti-Semites, by contrast, were merely being explicit.

The negative association between the two groups could incentivize those seeking support from Europeans to distance themselves from Jews too. When the veteran of the 1878 Congress Minas Tcheraz addressed an audience in Newcastle, he refuted the imagined links between the two groups: ‘European people generally regarded the Armenian as a sort of Christian Jew, ready to emigrate even to the moon if he knew there was money to be made there (Laughter.) They were represented as being quite free from any patriotic sentiment. Nothing could be more false.’<sup>133</sup> Instead, Tcheraz portrayed the Armenians as the bulwark of Christian Europe, emphasizing ‘their fidelity to the religion of Christ’. The Armenians, wrote the scholar Robert Ellis Thompson, ‘are of our own kindred – not Shemite, like the Jews and Arabs, nor Turanian, like the Turks and Hungarians, but Aryan...That is to say, away back in the past our fathers and theirs occupied the same country, spoke the same language, followed the same customs, worshipped the same God.’<sup>134</sup>

The sense that humanitarian concern was a zero-sum game was felt acutely in the Jewish community itself. ‘Unlike the Armenians’, wrote Albert Löwy, one of the leaders of the Anglo-Jewish Society, ‘the cause of the oppressed Jews was not pleaded on every occasion by Royalty, statesmen and publicists. Except for the assistance given by the Foreign Office, the persecuted Jews in foreign lands had nowhere to look for help except to their coreligionists.’<sup>135</sup> Similar concerns were expressed by the *Jewish Chronicle*, stating that ‘The vile butchery that has turned Armenia into a shambles may be more shocking, it is not a whit more deadly, it is far less torturous than the policy of overcrowding Jews into the pale which has turned so much of the Czar’s dominions into a fever den.’<sup>136</sup> As the *Archives israélites de France* asserted, ‘whereas Catholics and

<sup>132</sup> *Les massacres d’Arménie: réponse du Sultan à M. Clemenceau traduite par Urbain Gohier* (Paris, 1896), pp. 11–12.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Armenia and the Armenians – interesting lecture at the Tyne Theatre’, *Newcastle Chronicle*, 1 Feb. 1896.

<sup>134</sup> Robert Ellis Thompson, ‘The first Christian nation – under the unspeakable Turk’, *New Ross Standard*, 5 Jan. 1895.

<sup>135</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 July 1896.

<sup>136</sup> ‘Jews and the crisis: some stray thoughts’, *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 Jan. 1896.

Protestants rely on those states that are officially of their confession, the Israelites have nowhere in the world a fellow state, a navy or army which might rise up – or threaten to rise up – for an Ireland or for an Armenian'.<sup>137</sup>

Plans for the creation of such a 'fellow state' were in fact emerging within the Zionist movement then being formed under the leadership of Theodor Herzl. As Derek Penslar has shown, whilst Herzl displayed some sympathy towards the Armenians, his realism led him to view their national pretensions as futile.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, in co-ordination with Sultan Abdulhamid, Herzl even approached the representatives of the Armenian revolutionary movements encouraging them to come to terms with the Sublime Porte – a 'truce' in exchange for a promise of further reforms. For Herzl, the upshot would be a recognition of the Jewish cause in Palestine: 'The Armenians should not know that our participation is based on our own national interests', he stated, 'Our aim is to induce the Armenian Committees...to conclude an armistice until August. I say armistice, and not peace, since in the meantime we may be able to deal with the Sultan and obtain some concessions for ourselves.'<sup>139</sup>

Herzl's strategy highlights the practical connections that also existed between the two 'Questions'. From one perspective, the massacres presented an opportunity for a favourable geopolitical realignment: England's abandonment of the Ottoman Empire and 'rapprochement with France and Russia'. 'Nothing could be better for Jews', the *Jewish Chronicle* opined,

[T]o the latter England will give consent to act as deliverer of Armenian Christians. But England cannot forget...that there are Russian Jews who require 'delivering' as much as do the Armenian Christians. Thus Russia will be compelled to mitigate the horrors of the Pale – as deadly as, and possibly more cruel even, than – the massacres for which the Sultan is being called to account.<sup>140</sup>

On the other hand, as one reader of the *Jewish Chronicle* believed, agitation by Jews in favour of the Armenians might affect the privileged position of the *millet* in Turkey itself. The 'danger of this [favourable] treatment being reversed will be increased if we, as a body, identify ourselves with the agitation now proceeding'.<sup>141</sup> It was, in fact, this proximity to the Sultan that led Bernard Lazare, a prominent early Zionist and defender of the Armenian cause, to leave the movement.<sup>142</sup>

Strategic, geopolitical considerations aside, there was undeniably a surge of support among Jewish communities in Britain and France for the Armenians.

<sup>137</sup> *Archives israélites de France*, 26 Dec. 1895.

<sup>138</sup> Derek Jonathan Penslar, *Theodor Herzl: the charismatic leader* (New Haven, CT, 2020), pp. 100–1.

<sup>139</sup> Theodor Herzl to Solomon J. Solomon, 2 May 1896, cited in Marwan R. Buheiry, 'Theodor Herzl and the Armenian Question', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 7 (1977), pp. 75–97, at p. 87.

<sup>140</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 Jan. 1896.

<sup>141</sup> 'Jews and the Armenian cause', *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 Jan. 1896.

<sup>142</sup> Carol Iancu, 'Charles Péguy, Bernard Lazare, l'affaire Dreyfus, et les Arméniens', in Patrick Louvier, Annick Asso, and Hélène Demirdjian, eds., *Exprimer le génocide des Arméniens: connaissance, arts et engagement* (Rennes, 2016), pp. 39–50.

The *Jewish Chronicle*, for its part, paid close attention to developments in the Ottoman Empire, reporting on the messages of sympathy expressed by rabbis across the country in addresses to their congregations. One reader wrote to the newspaper emphasizing that no Jew could uphold the 'barbarous conduct' of the Sultan simply 'because the Turk happens to be friendly inclined towards our race'. Surprised that the Day of Atonement had not stimulated more expressions of support from the rabbis of Manchester, another reader asserted: 'One would have thought that humanity would have not only prompted, but demanded, the preachers to think of the horrible torture of these poor sufferers. Does not the Mosaic law teach us to assist the oppressed?'<sup>143</sup> The *Archives israélites de France* was notably more reserved than its British counterpart throughout the conflict, perhaps reflecting the greater propensity for public opinion to shift the blame back onto the Jews themselves. Similar initiatives were nonetheless underway in France, and it was reported that the Chief Rabbi, Zadoc Kahn, among other prominent Jews, had signed a petition of the Franco-Armenian committee demanding more concrete action from the Council of Ministers.<sup>144</sup>

Broader meetings were also being organized, as when the leaders of the British Jewish community gathered with Christian dignitaries at the Jewish Working Men's Club in London to stress their solidarity with the Armenians. The meeting also included speeches by Conservative and Liberal politicians. Some remarks reproduced the discourse of 'uniting together for the cause of humanity', but others were more clearly inflected with the spirit of Jewish tradition.<sup>145</sup> James Bryce himself was present, and appealed to the Jews of his former constituency of Tower Hamlets, comparing the current atrocities to the persecution of Jews during the middle ages.<sup>146</sup> Rabbi S. Singer, meanwhile, underscored the biblical commandment 'Thou should not stand by the blood of thy brother man' (Leviticus 19:16). In a more ominous tone, he asserted that '[i]t had been asked why should the Jews interfere? seeing that they were not persecuted by Turkey? His answer: Today Christians were persecuted. Tomorrow it would be the turn of the Jews.'<sup>147</sup>

<sup>143</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 Sept. 1896.

<sup>144</sup> *Archives israélites des France*, 2 Sept. 1897, p. 443.

<sup>145</sup> 'The Armenian massacres: great meeting in Whitechapel', *Essex Guardian*, 17 Oct. 1896.

<sup>146</sup> Bryce had made comparisons between Jews and Armenians in an earlier work: 'The Armenians are an extraordinary people', he wrote, 'with a tenacity of natural life scarcely inferior to that of the Jews, and perhaps more remarkable, since it has not been forced upon them by such unremitting persecution', in James Bryce, *Transcaucasia and Ararat: being notes of a vacation tour in the autumn of 1876* (London, 1877), p. 311. Significantly, in the fourth edition of the text, published in 1896, Bryce dropped this point of difference as it was evident from the massacres that it was no longer valid: 'The Armenians are an extraordinary people, with a tenacity of national life scarcely inferior to that of the Jews': James Bryce, *Transcaucasia and Ararat: being notes of a vacation tour in the autumn of 1876* (4th revised edn, London, 1896), p. 329.

<sup>147</sup> 'The Armenian atrocities. Great meeting at Whitechapel', *Tower Hamlets Independent and East End Local Advertiser*, 17 Oct. 1896.

## IV

You don't seem to realize, I replied, that I am not here as a Jew but as American Ambassador. My country contains something more than 97,000,000 Christians and something less than 3,000,000 Jews. So, at least in my ambassadorial capacity, I am 97 per cent. Christian. But after all, that is not the point. I do not appeal to you in the name of any race or any religion, but merely as a human being.<sup>148</sup>

Henry Morgenthau's expression of solidarity with the abstract, suffering individual has been quoted as evidence of the humanitarian conscience that emerged in the wake of the First World War and the Armenian genocide.<sup>149</sup> Neither race nor religion, he implied, ought to determine attitudes to the ill-treatment of fellow human beings. Whilst Morgenthau's sentiment was noble, our understanding of the situation shifts when we consider the question to which this statement was offered in reply. 'Why are you interested in the Armenians anyway?' an Ottoman official had asked. 'You are a Jew; these people are Christians. The Mohammedans and Jews always get on harmoniously. We are treating the Jews here all right. What have you to complain of? Why can't you let us do with these Christians as we please?'<sup>150</sup> For Morgenthau, the problem lay in the 'Turk's' inability to conceive of humanity as a greater weight in the balance between the universal individual and the various amalgamations of race and religion that constituted the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman official, on the other hand, viewed the ambassador as a member of a Jewish community whose rights as a religious group were guaranteed, in a framework that excluded the 'national' pretensions of the Armenians. The two men viewed these groups as elements in two very different equations. Adopting the humanitarian perspective on the plight of the Armenian and Jewish minorities was always a choice, and not one that was always self-evident to British and French observers. As we have sought to demonstrate here, in the first half of the nineteenth century, Armenians and Jews shared a fundamental 'otherness' in Western eyes, as members of an imagined 'Orient'. But as religiously and ethnically liminal groups, their position in this discourse was ambiguous: they might seem closer to or further apart from the West – and each other – according to the intentions of the observer. This made them flexible components in discussions of the 'Eastern Question' to which British and French commentators sought an answer: they could be both a 'problem' and a 'solution' to the dilemma of reviving, maintaining, or dissolving the Ottoman Empire. This shared liminality was explained in biblical, historical, racial, religious, and national terms – categories through which both similarities and differences between the two groups could be understood. These were comparisons and contrasts that also allowed European observers to project their domestic concerns regarding the Jews onto the position of Armenians in international relations, and vice versa.

<sup>148</sup> Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's story* (New York, NY, 1918), p. 402.

<sup>149</sup> See, for example, Bass, *Freedom's battle*.

<sup>150</sup> Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's story*, p. 402.

In the diplomatic negotiations that structured discussions of the Eastern Question between 1856 and 1878, the ‘otherness’ of Jews and Armenians was formalized in the ‘minority’ status that both groups were assigned. But the causes they represented were increasingly disentangled as *Realpolitik* led Western governments to address the Balkan and Turkish dimensions of the Eastern Question separately. A radical, universalist argument could be presented in defence of all minorities, but the prevalent liberal, rights-based discourse in which these discussions were framed allowed the Jewish Question to be framed in religious terms in Romania and Serbia, whilst the Armenian Question was presented as one of national rights in Anatolia – whatever the reality of the groups’ claims on the ground. The deep-seated associations between the two groups remained, allowing each group to function as an interpretative tool in addressing each context. As the ‘Jews of the East’, for instance, the Armenians could be denied the right to national autonomy on the grounds that they were merely a diasporic community of faith; as a fundamentally ‘Aryan’ national group, on the other hand, the claims of the Armenians could be clearly distinguished from those of the Jews.

By the 1890s, as targeted violence against Jews and Armenians appeared to threaten not their rights but their very existence, it was a shared humanity that appeared to unite the causes of these two ‘othered’ minorities. When viewed in these universal terms, support for one group naturally necessitated support for the other. *Realpolitik* once again encouraged the situation in Russia and the Balkans to be distinguished from that in the Ottoman Empire, however, fostering a sense that ‘humanitarian’ concern was in fact a zero-sum game: to defend one cause was to neglect the other. Domestic concerns remained, moreover, and in the increasingly anti-Semitic environment that was late nineteenth-century Western Europe, the pre-existing associations between Jews and Armenian resurfaced: both minorities could be presented as national or religious outsiders, making the context of their persecution purportedly ‘relatable’. The humanitarian question had emerged, and the considerable support displayed for both Jews and Armenians testifies to its importance, but it was a question that not all those involved were seeking to answer.

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