
A Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War

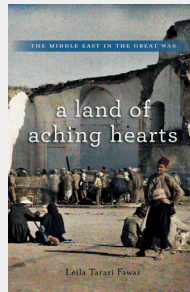
By Leila Tarazi Fawaz

Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014, 416 pages, \$35.00, ISBN: 9780674735491.

Reviewed by Çağatay Özdemir

THE FIRST WORLD WAR (WWI) was the biggest war that the world had ever seen, at least until the beginning of the 20th century, due to the large number of people and countries embroiled in the conflict, the extent of the territories involved, and the wide usage of technology for the first time. The war, which started in 1915 with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian nationalist, lasted for 4 years and ended in 1919 with the defeat of the Central Powers that consisted of Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire. WWI's social, economic and cultural influences continue to have consequences today. These upshots are notably visible in the Middle East, arguably one of the regions that suffered the most from the war. The war brought an end to 400 years of Ottoman rule in the Middle East. At the war's close, the regions' geographical borders were redrawn, the gap between ethnic and religious groups widened, relations among states changed considerably, and new ideologies began to spread. WWI sowed the seeds of the conflicts that still continue in the region today.

For this reason, many historians and academicians have examined, analyzed and tried to make sense of the First World War for years. Yet most of these works take an academic approach towards the subject and aim to show the wider picture to modern day readers.



And notably, most of these books have approached the topic from an outsider perspective. In contrast, Leila Tarazi Fawaz has adopted an insider attitude in her book *A Land of Aching Hearts*, intertwining major historical events with glimpses of ordinary people's lives. Rather than portraying a soulless historical period that consists only of dates and truces, Fawaz creates a reality by focusing on the life of the common people. Her main aim is to present contemporary readers with the perspectives of common people who witnessed the First World War's atrocities. For this reason, she uses first-hand resources such as diaries and letters that were written during the period, and includes the thoughts and concerns of different people. The contribution that Fawaz adds to the official history is an emotional element which is lacking in many works focused on the events of WWI. For instance, Fawaz touches on the story of a young woman called Maryam (p.109). At the same time, she examines more general issues such as the Gallipoli campaign of the Entente Powers (p. 44). In this way, the book becomes even more attractive.

A Land of Aching Hearts focuses on the Ottoman Army and Ottoman territory, giving air time to the soldiers' experiences. The Ottoman Army was created as an imitation of the Prussian army. By the end of the 1916, all the men between the ages of 17-55 – including

Christians, who had not been conscripted until that time – were conscripted for the Ottoman army. In total, 2.85 million people were conscripted out of approximately 25 million subjects that could be counted as the manpower within the borders of the Ottoman Empire (p. 162). Most of the soldiers came from the rural areas of the empire, as major cities like Istanbul and Mecca were excluded from the process of conscription. During the war, there were a total of nearly 1 million casualties; nearly 325-600 thousand of these victims were killed in battle. In an addition to these deaths, hundreds of thousands of people died because of illnesses related to the conflict, and 250 thousand people were reported missing at the end of the war.

The book consists of seven chapters. The first chapter portrays the pre-war Middle East in nearly every aspect. Traditional loyalties, ideologies that existed during that time period, the socio-economic situation, and the perspective of the people regarding the impending war are explained in detail. The next chapter takes into account the situation of the Ottoman Empire during the war. This chapter mainly focuses on the truces and military interventions that were enacted by the Empire. The following chapters mostly treat the effects of the war on society. One of the most significant of these effects was the scarcity of food which spread throughout the empire during the war. Directly after the beginning of the war, even the essential nutrients become unreachable for the majority of people. Plagues were also among the most influential side effects of the war on the lives of people in the Middle East and in the Ottoman realms at large. Illnesses such as cholera, typhus, typhoid, and malaria quickly spread throughout the region in a very short time. Without a doubt, soldiers bore the greatest brunt of all of these disasters, so much so that

those who died because of the plagues and scarcity outnumbered those killed in battle. Before long, soldiers who did not even have proper uniforms were forced to sell their guns in exchange for basic necessities. Nevertheless, the war brought many new opportunities, and those who knew how to utilize these opportunities created a newly emerging and prospering middle class. This situation led to the emergence of an elite group in society, while the majority were living in need; this eventually resulted in an even wider gap between the social classes. *A Land of Aching Hearts* also focuses on the lives and attitudes of the minorities in the region, such as Armenians and Jews, during the war. Fawaz also addresses the South Asians who fought for the British, and the effects of ethnic and religious differences in the region on social life.

This book, which focuses on WWI from the perspective of the Middle East, gradually presents the reader with the phases of the war and emphasizes the effects of the war. An important aspect of this book is the fact that the Fawaz does not consider only the interval of 1914-1918. Rather, she covers a wider period – which proves to be crucial during the analysis – starting from 1871 until the end of the 1920s. More specifically, the book starts with the foundation of the Triple alliance in 1871 and continues to focus on the region until the end of the 1920s. Moreover, the real stories that are occasionally mentioned and the quotations from ordinary people contribute to the fluency of the book. That is to say, the book manages to make the period much more real for readers without becoming fictional. Lastly, Fawaz's impartial and objective stance has to be mentioned as one of the unique features of the book. For instance, while discussing Cemal Pasha – who was both loved and hated during that time – the

author is careful to portray both of these perspectives without being biased.

The new perspective on WWI portrayed in *A Land of Aching Hearts* is itself enough to

make the book worth reading. Especially as far as the academicians and students of international relations are concerned, this book may be beneficial in terms of providing insight into the Middle East of WWI.

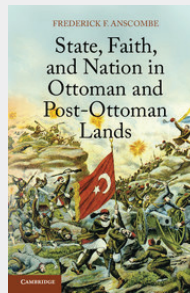
State, Faith, and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands

By Frederick Anscombe

USA: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 339 pages, \$34.99, ISBN: 9781107615236.

Reviewed by Dunja Resanović

IN *STATE, FAITH, AND NATION IN OTTOMAN AND POST-OTTOMAN LANDS*, Frederick F. Anscombe frames his narrative around the themes of “state, faith, and nation,” concerning which the dominant scholarly narratives about the history of Ottoman and Post-Ottoman lands are wavering. The author aims at challenging the (pre)assumptions of the existing scholarship, and shedding new light on the aforementioned subject. His reevaluation emphasizes the transition from the Ottoman to post-Ottoman lands, drawing attention to the importance of understanding how religion and nation were developed and used by the post-Ottoman states as social and political concepts. It is clear that Anscombe is interested in religion as a social concept, particularly the way it has been reciprocally framed and used as an ideological and identity tool, as well as a legitimizer in the state-population interrelation. This emphasis on religion as an ideological tool gives rise to uncertainty regarding the reasons why the author chose the term “faith” for his title and definition of his main themes, given that faith seems to connote a more spiritual frame of mind on the part of religious believers.



The first part of the book, “The Ottoman Empire,” provides an extensive overview of the Empire’s political transitions, starting from the mid-eighteenth century until its dissolution, looking at it through the prism of complex interrelations of identity and the ideological nature of the state, relations between the state and its population, and external developments and international affairs. Using a vast literature of secondary sources dealing with the period, Anscombe reassesses what has been written in order to set the ground for his main argument and new narrative perspective. His reevaluation is extremely valuable for registering the importance of the relationship between the state and its population. Looking back at primary sources, Anscombe offers a better understanding of popular allegiances and state legitimacy. Thus, Anscombe develops two main arguments: first, that Islam had played the role of comprising the ideological backbone of the state, granting identity to the Empire and ensuring its legitimacy; and second that the population consequently identified within its religious identities on the supra-local level until the Empire’s dissolution.