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Bir Haber Ŗâyi' Oldu ki: Rumor and Regicide*

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And who but Rumor, who but only I,
Make fearful musters, and prepared defence,
While the big year, swollen with some other grief,
Is thought with child by the stern tyrant War,
And no such matter? Rumor is a pipe
Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures,
And of so easy and so plain a stop
That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,
The still-discordant wavering multitude,
Can play upon it ...¹

Rien n'est à négliger. La lointaine rumeur
Souvent aux souverains annonce leur malheur ...²

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1 The figure of rumor makes its entrance at the beginning of Part Two of Shakespeare's Henry IV. Cited by Hans-Joachim Neubauer, *The Rumour: A Cultural History*, trans. Christian Brown (London, 1999), 74-75.

2 Voltaire, cited by Jean Lacouture, "Bruit et Information," in *La Rumeur [Le Genre Humain 5]* (Paris, 1982), 19 (There is no reference to the source in Lacouture).

Why Rumor?

The regicide of Osman II was a first in Ottoman history. Even though there had been tensions between the Sultan and his *kuls* before 1622, the janissaries and the sipahis, for the first time, not only deposed a Sultan but also were directly involved in the regicide. After returning from an unsuccessful campaign, the *kul*, suspecting that the young and ambitious Sultan Osman II, under the pretext of going to the hajj, was about to leave Istanbul in order to recruit a new army and then replace them with his newly recruited soldiers, rebelled in the capital. The rebellion, which started with familiar scenes of discontent on May 18, 1622, radicalized in three days and led to the deposition and the execution of Osman II.³ Naturally, seventeenth and eighteenth century chroniclers wrote about this traumatic event. But the regicide also became a major historiographical reference point for the historians, amateur and professional, for their overall interpretation of the Ottoman history after the nineteenth century. Recent historiographical accounts show the extent to which these differences of interpretation were, in turn, related to changing social and economic structures and ideologies.⁴ While the seventeenth and the eighteenth century chroniclers dwell on the inexperience of the Sultan, the corruption of his “inner circle” and use a moral language to explain the events in terms of ill-advice, the historians of the later centuries use a more modern language based on the dichotomy of progress and reaction whereby the clash between the progressive ideals of the Sultan and the conservative mind set of the janissaries is at the root of the incident. However, crude dichotomies usually project their own prejudices to the past and reduce the complexity of historical change to ideological battleground. In their totalizing attempts, dichotomies also relegate many interesting aspects of historical change to the background as irrelevant minor details.

3 For an analytical and comparative account of the regicide with the other depositions of the Ottoman sultans see, Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, *Le Sérail ébranlé: Essai sur les morts, dépositions et événements des sultans ottomans XIVe-XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2003), 221-240. For a more chronological and narrative account, see Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923* (New York, 2005), 195-205.

4 Baki Tezcan, “The 1622 Military Rebellion in Istanbul: A Historiographical Journey,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 8 (2002): 25 – 43.

Modern historians, even when critical of the progressive – conservative framework, spend considerable effort in delineating the long term causes of the incident but rarely concentrate on the immediate grounds of the uprising and the radicalization of the movement in a few days. The author of the most comprehensive study of the event, Baki Tezcan, asserts that even though the pilgrimage campaign was the immediate cause of the uprising there is no conclusive evidence to fully support that argument.⁵ It seems as if the sparkle that ignited the fire came from a void and is likely to remain there. This, however, does not mean that the pilgrimage campaign was purely fabricated. A careful reconstruction of the context makes it highly possible that Osman II's intention was indeed to recruit a new army and/or make substantial changes in the state apparatus.⁶ In the following I propose to look at an elusive and highly speculative aspect of the incident: the role of rumor in the deposition and regicide of Osman II.

An instinctive reaction to rumor is to condemn it as morally wrong and dismiss it as false information or beliefs not backed by any sort of tangible evidence. However various studies on rumor have shown it to be a crucial factor in mass mobilization; an important factor that lays bare the deep-seated prejudices or beliefs of the crowds. As it is argued in a recent collection of essays on rumor, “over time, [rumor studies] have evolved from a confrontation between the scholar – fighting rumor and “false” information – and the rumor-monger – a bigot considered as the enemy - to a more analytical attempt to understand the social dynamics that create and spread rumors.”⁷ As the oldest media of the world,⁸ rumor continues to be an integral part of social life. The enlightenment of modernity does not seem to have dispelled the prejudices, fears, and ungrounded assumptions

5 Baki Tezcan, “Searching for Osman: A Reassessment of the Deposition of the Ottoman Sultan Osman II (1618-1622),” Ph.D. dissertation (Princeton University, 2001), 221.

6 “Thus, the rumors circulating in the capital right around the time of the rebellion to the effect that the Sultan was planning to crush his own army seem to have had a sound basis. And even if Osman II was not planning to do that, the particular configuration of these pieces of evidence could have supported such rumors;” *ibid.*, 228.

7 Véronique Campion-Vincent, “Introduction,” in *Rumor Mills: The Social Impact of Rumor and Legend*, eds. Gary Alan Fine, Véronique Campion-Vincent, and Chip Heath (New Brunswick and London, 2005).

8 Jean-Noel Kapferer, *Rumeurs: Le Plus Vieux Média du Monde* (Paris, 1987).

that feed rumor. As a matter of fact, rumor spreads even more effectively with an expanding public sphere, and keeps up with the accelerating pace of communication. Every major aspect of modern life, race, ethnicity, migration, globalization, corporate malfeasance, and government corruption can be studied in their relation to rumor.⁹ Depending on its context, rumor can be subversive, or oppressive; it can be a resistance mechanism for the “weak,”¹⁰ but it can also be used by a majority against a minority group by turning them into a scapegoat.

Most of the rumor studies draw attention to the role of rumor in inciting violence or its prevalence in times of uncertainty; “in prejudice and conflicts, rumors express emotions and anxieties that are preexisting but also fuel and strengthen them. Stereotypes not only distort reality but also create it, locking accusers and accused in an all too real prison of envy and fear.”¹¹ However, while rumor is generally based on a target group, an *Other* which threatens *Us*, it also functions in subtler ways within the same group.¹² Thus, at times, neither a weapon of the weak, nor a propaganda tool for mobilizing the masses against an already excluded *Other*, rumor can be a strategy in inter-elite struggle for hegemony.

Along with rumor, there is also a range of concepts that can be used to delineate different characteristics of similar social phenomenon; gossip, (urban) legends and conspiracy theories have convergence points but are nevertheless different with regard to their sources, target, scope and effects. While gossip is confined to smaller and more immediate circumstances and conspiracy theories are much more comprehensive in their scope and evoke a different emotion than the fear or anxiety that rumor creates; “conspiracy theories, with their vast, seamless portrayal of history, do evoke a kind of pleasurable awe. The idea that the world we perceive may be an illusion is an old source of fascination in philosophical puzzles, and conspiracy theories may package this fascination in a way that

9 The above-mentioned topics are the major sections of the recent collection of essays on rumor; see Fine, Campion-Vincent, and Heath (eds.), *Rumor Mills*; for the political sociology of rumor, see, Philippe Aldrin, *Sociologie politique des rumeurs* (Paris, 2005).

10 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London, 1985), 280-285.

11 Campion-Vincent, “Introduction,” 13.

12 Chip Heath, “Introduction,” in *Rumor Mills*, 83.

provides mass-market appeal.”¹³ Furthermore, rumor is also placed “on a continuum with myth, folktale or anecdote,” and as such, becomes part of a much larger framework of reference for the collective memory or unconscious of communities.¹⁴ In this regard, there is a well established tradition in Western iconography, political thought and literature in relation to which rumor, as a literary term or a political concept has been transmitted, discussed or re-formulated throughout the centuries. Classical texts such Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* or Virgil’s *Aeneid* provided the literary and intellectual background for Renaissance and early-modern authors who often depicted rumor in similar ways. Virgil’s depiction of rumor in the *Aeneid*, as a monster “with piercing eyes and millions of mouths,” and as a figure whose “every mouth is furnished with a tongue / and round with listening ears the flying plague is hung” was,¹⁵ to a great extent, carried over to the early modern period.¹⁶

Rumor or fame (*fama*) depicted as an aerial figure with tongues and ears on its body also elucidates some of the underlying assumptions of gender formation in the early modern period. Even though in traditional representations it is ambiguously gendered, gossip and rumor were intimately connected with women. In early modern England, for instance, gossip was an exclusively female characteristic.¹⁷ Rumor in turn was seen as a form of information whose ambiguity was due to female talk’s seeping into the male sphere which was at the same time the sphere of political authority. In similar ways, the patriarchal formation of societies shows the extent to which the “anxiety about women ‘taking over’ male domains of informational authority and control, of infecting male spaces with gossip, [bolstered] the necessity of reinforcing gender binaries or, at least, male domains of information.”¹⁸ The emphasis on the gossiping women as a factor corrupting political authority was a means to create scapegoats and draw attention from male anxieties in their struggle for hegemony – a set

13 Ibid.

14 Patricia Turner, “Introduction,” in *Rumor Mills*, 169.

15 Keith M. Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses: Rumor and Early Modern Masculinity* (New York, 2009), 11.

16 See the essays in M.T. Jones-Davies (ed.), *Rumeur et Nouvelles au Temps de la Renaissance* (Paris: 1997).

17 Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses*, 8-9.

18 Ibid., 9.

of assumptions that should sound very familiar to the students of the Ottoman history and its “decline.”

Obviously there was more to the anxiety about rumor in the Renaissance and early modern period than the literary tradition that reproduced a discourse on rumor. The monetization of the economy, expanding trade relations, and the establishment of joint stock companies, for the first time, created the conditions in which rumor as speculation could ruin fortunes overnight; hence, the increasing need for differentiating news as grounded and reliable information from hearsay. In this sense, there also came into being “news business,” and “the emergent news industry presented an unmistakable challenge to poets and playwrights who witnessed how a share of the domestic reading market was slowly being occupied by the relative newcomers.”¹⁹ Moreover, one of the consequences of religious and civil wars was to aggravate an already deep sense of insecurity, suspicion, and conspiracy, and heighten the urgency for intelligence. Finally, military competition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the state centralization entailed firmer control of the news and of the flow of information. Add to these factors, the impact of the printing press in disseminating all sorts of news and ideas, it is easier to grasp the context in which how rumor could be seen, especially by the authorities or claimants of power, as a major concern.

The pursuit of reliable information was not something new but the reconfiguration of power relations in the early modern context also reshaped the connection between rumor and news. For instance, the most influential bankers of the sixteenth century, the financiers of kings, the Fuggers, had relied on innumerable sources of information flowing literally from all over the world. All sorts of news, including rumors, were part of what was later called the Fugger Newsletters.²⁰ The Fuggers’ interest in the news, including rumors, illustrate the early forms of intimate and anxiety-ridden relationship between trade, capital formation, and speculation. However, as considerable as this investment in the news was, it

19 Ton Hoenselaars, “Rumour, News and Commerce in Ben Johnson’s the Staple of News,” in *Rumeur et Nouvelles*, 144.

20 George T. Matthews (ed.), *News and Rumor in Renaissance Europe: The Fugger Newsletters* (New York, 1959).

was confined to business circles. As the Fuggers started to decline,²¹ there were major transformations in the content and the form of news and news reporting too. The real change was that “between Fugger Newsletters privately exchanged for the commercial benefit of the Augsburg banking family between 1568 and 1604, and the institutionalized, commercialized dissemination of new publications of Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline London publications ranging from popular information to political tidings in the form of newsletters from Europe.”²² With further centralization of the state apparatus and the expansion of the public sphere, the political effects of rumors became more pressing and immediate.

Even though it is still an understudied subject, it appears that the Ottoman state was also actively engaged in intelligence gathering both in its realms, especially in the capital, and about its rivals. Most of what we know on how the Ottoman authorities tried to control the threatening effects of the dissemination of subversive political discourse has come, so far, from the studies on the coffeehouses, the formation of public opinion or the public sphere,²³ but as Gabor Agoston suggests, despite the fact that Ottoman intelligence gathering never quite matched the sophistication of the Venetian or Spanish intelligence-services, “at least four levels of Ottoman information-gathering may be discerned: (1) central intelligence in Istanbul, (2) information-gathering by local Ottoman authorities, especially along the empire’s frontiers, (3) intelligence provided by Istanbul’s client or vassal states, and (4) espionage and counter-espionage carried out by the Porte’s spies and saboteurs in foreign countries.”²⁴ Agoston’s remarks are important because one of the most common assumptions about Otto-

21 In 1655, Emperor Ferdinand III, probably profiting from the financial decline of the house of Fuggers, bought their library, a collection of 14,000 volumes for 15,000 guildens. What would later be called the Fugger Newsletters came out of the manuscripts that were part of the library collection.

22 Ton Hoenselaars, “Rumour, News and Commerce,” 144.

23 For a recent interpretation with specific references to rumor and control of rumor in the public sphere, see Uğur Kömeçoğlu, “Homo Ludens ve Homo Sapiens Arasında Kamusal ve Toplumsal: Osmanlı Kahvehaneleri,” in *Osmanlı Kahvehaneleri: Mekan, Sosyalleşme, İktidar*, ed. Ahmet Yaşar (Istanbul, 2009).

24 Gabor Agoston, “Information, ideology, and limits of imperial policy: Ottoman grand strategy in the context of Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry,” in *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, eds. Virginia Aksan and Daniel Goffman (Cambridge, 2007), 81-82.

man's lack of interest in the wider world has been that their military might and success gave them such confidence and sense of superiority that they did not bother investing much effort in collecting information about their rivals or what lies beyond their (ever expanding) borders. Further research on this topic can help to dispel or, at least, put into perspective another myth taken for granted. Despite the fact that the Ottoman state's concern with a well maintained internal order vouched in the dichotomy between order and rebellion, (*nizam* versus *fitne*) and how it evolved with the modernization of the state apparatus is much better documented,²⁵ various aspects of the relationship between the subversive words and the political authority are yet to be analyzed seriously.

Rumor and Regicide

Historians who wrote about the regicide of Osman II in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries frequently referred to "the news heard or spreading" (usually in the form of "*haberler şâyi oldu ki*"), or to those figures who knew something was going to happen but passed their sources over in silence. In most of the texts there is also a fascinating movement in the capital city during the tumultuous May days of the uprising. The *kul* gathers in large numbers, writes petitions, voices its discontent, protests and pillages. The viziers, the ulema, and other prominent figures move from one place to another and try to mediate between the *kul* and the Sultan. Sometimes the locomotion ends and the quiet reigns in the city. Then, the rumor flies in darkness and informs the respective parties of the next move of their opponents. There arise from within these silences and the darkness of the night, assumptions, fears, and doubts; thus an array of feelings and thoughts that not only radicalizes the uprising of the *kul* but also gives the impression that the *kul* was responding spontaneously to the justifiably perceived threats rather than carrying out a more or less premeditated plan

25 There are many insightful studies about the modernization process and how power configurations evolved throughout the nineteenth century. Here, I will refer only to a couple of studies which are more in line with the topic at hand; Cengiz Kırılı, "The Struggle over Space: Coffeehouses of Ottoman Istanbul 1780-1845," Ph.D. dissertation (State University of New York at Binghamton, 2000). See also, Cengiz Kırılı, *Sultan ve Kamuoyu: Osmanlı Modernleşme Sürecinde "Havadis Journaleri" (1840-1844)*, ed. Emre Yalçın (Istanbul, 2009).

of action. It may, therefore, be interesting to have a closer look into these silences.

Gabriel Piterberg and Baki Tezcan have carefully followed the chronology of the incident, reconstructed the political, economic, and ideological context of the period, and dealt extensively with the historiographical issues at stake. In the following, I will rely on their insights for the specific historical dimensions of the early seventeenth century and will also take the liberty to follow their methodological and critical remarks on the historiography of the incident. They amply demonstrated that Tuđi Tarihi (or the chronicle known as *Vak'a-i Sultan Osman*) had a major influence on the later historians, at least, until the nineteenth century. It became the ur-text as Piterberg defines it,²⁶ but at the same time it represented a particular point of view: a point of view that was explicitly hostile to Osman II's immediate surrounding and defended the claims of the *kul* without necessarily justifying the act of the regicide itself. Other historians of the period can be situated in an ideological field according to their relation to Tuđi's position, and most of them concurred with Tuđi's interpretation, except İbrahim Peçevi. Piterberg argues that "the fundamentally antithetic nature of Peçevi's representation lies in its favorable view of Sultan Osman, and more clearly, his strong disapproval of the *kul*, their role in [the incident], and the power they wielded."²⁷ In line with this argument, I will accept that Tuđi and Peçevi represent two different interpretations, and that any attempt for textual interpretation should take into consideration the ideological perspectives they offer. In this respect, Piterberg's approach is particularly important in that to situate the texts in their ideological context in order to recover the intentions of their authors can also be used as the

26 Apart from Tezcan's studies, op.cit., Piterberg's book and articles on the different historiographical aspects of the event are indispensable for anyone interested in the event; Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley, 2003); Gabriel Piterberg, "Speech Acts and Written Texts: A Reading of a 17th Century Ottoman Historiographic Episode," *Poetics Today* 14 (1993); Gabriel Piterberg, "The Alleged Rebellion of Abaza Mehmed Paşa: Historiography and the Ottoman State in the 17th Century," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 8 (2002); Gabriel Piterberg, "The Varieties of Territorial Sites in the Poetic and Historical Imagination of the Ottomans," unpublished paper presented at *The Meanings of Land: Law, Ideology, Identity* (UC Berkeley, October 2001).

27 Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*, 107.

methodological ground for interpreting the function of rumor in the same texts. Furthermore, Piterberg's remarks go beyond a recovery of the illocutionary meaning of the texts, and attempt to disclose the implicit assumptions of their social and literary "imaginaire" of the early Ottoman polity. His interpretive framework, thus, provides a comprehensive background for the always elusive function of rumor.²⁸

My first aim is to focus on how rumor is represented in these texts rather than a reevaluation of the historiography. In this vein, I will try to find the most explicit references to rumor in order to underline its importance in the narratives rather than engaging in comprehensive textual analysis. One of the essential questions, in this respect, is whether or not rumor is used as a strategy, as a literary or ideological means for the purpose of conveying a message; to create a scapegoat, to relieve a particular group from the burden of responsibility, to convince the readers that the threat to the body politic was imminent, or to caution, not only their contemporaries as well as the future readers about the always present danger of rumor in the context of crisis. These questions in turn imply that the relation between rumor as a social and sociological phenomenon and rumor as a textual strategy is a crucial one that has to be kept in mind.²⁹ Most of the sociological studies are in agreement that rumor as a social phenomenon has a life cycle; it is born, spreads, and dies. Therefore, for those who are writing about the rumor-event, the chances are that they can give a more grounded narrative of the event after the life cycle of rumor closes. Why, then, is rumor so persistent in the narratives of the Ottoman historians? Even if some studies suggest that similar rumors may circulate in the future, a particular rumor rarely repeats itself in the same way.³⁰ But once part of a text which encloses it in its narrative, rumor "returns eternally," and always in the same way. Can we, then, argue that by making rumor an essential part of their narrative, the Ottoman historians were trying to keep it alive? Or were they just keen on recording the unfolding of the events with utmost accuracy? With these questions in mind, and after pointing out the extent to which

28 Ibid., see especially Chapter 3.

29 For a study that asks similar questions from a literary perspective see, H elene Celdran Johannessen, *Prophetes, sorciers rumeurs: La Violence dans trois romans de Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly* (Amsterdam, New York, 2008), especially 165-171.

30 Kapferer, *Rumeurs*, 132-145, and also Fine, Campion-Vincent, and Heath (eds.), *Rumor Mills*, 255-65.

the rumor plays an essential role in these narratives, I will try to situate the rumor in a more concrete context by looking at its emergence and the way it spreads in the capital. That is, I will try to connect the textual with social history by looking at how rumor, spreading from one place to another in an urban setting, helped mobilize the competing political factions. Finally, I will turn to the political dimension of the Ottoman polity and try to relate rumor to the rules of governance and sovereignty and make tentative remarks in comparison to early-modern European polities.

Let me, then, start with the texts, and point out some of the instances where rumor plays an important part in the narratives. Even though I will not follow a strictly chronological account of the regicide, the instances I have chosen relate more or less to the life cycle of rumor.

The Texts

I.

Before turning to the Ottoman observers of the regicide, it may be interesting to have a perspective “from without” hoping that this could also lay the groundwork for the comparative remarks on rumor that will follow later on. Sir Thomas Roe, the then English ambassador, with his friendship with the vizier Dilaver Pasha, was particularly well placed to write about the incident. Roe wrote extensively about the regicide, and his reports were immediately included in different news reports and also travel literature of his time, including Samuel Purchas’ *Pilgrims*. It appears that Roe was experienced enough to foresee the outcome of the events and had his ears open to the news circulating in the city. A long section from his accounts deserves to be quoted in length:

A second of lesse consequence in the Vizier Delaur Bassa, from whom the Lord Ambassador having received particular friendship about five days before the uprore, he went to visit, and having no other businesse but to persuade him to stay the King from this intended Pilgrimage, the Ambassador gave him many reasons in the present estate of their owne affairs, especially the Treaty of Poland yet depending. To which the Bassa replied very gravely. Then the Ambassador urging the feare of some tumult, collected from the licentious speeches rumoured in the Towne, and he was bold to deale

plainely, sincerely, and friendly, that if any such things should happen, the fault would bee imputed to the Bassa, as being of authoritie to persuade the King, whom his qualitie and youth would excuse, but all the furie would be discharged upon the greatest Minister; desiring him to consider the event, at least to take his affection in the best part. The old Renard stayed a while from replie: at last, smiling to himselfe at the Ambassador, who persuaded him against that which was his owne counsel, he gave him a finall answer, that there was no remedie, he durst not hazard himselfe to oppose the Kings resolution: but assured him, hee would so order the matter, as this iourney should not proceed so farre as expected. The Ambassador concluded for himselfe, desiring then that he would leave him a particular recommendation to the Chimakam or Deputie as his friend. To which hee sodainly replied, Trouble not your selfe, nor feare; I will never remove so farre, but that I will leave one of my legs in this city to serve you: which the poore man fulfilled; for being murdered in few days after, one his legs whole and entire was hanged in the Hippodrome, the most publike place of the Citie.³¹

His narrative, with his claims to have insider information, fully justifies the suspicions about Osman II's intentions to use pilgrimage as a pretext, to recruit a new army, to root out the *kul*, and to substantially reform the state apparatus.³² Roe also claims that the *kul* did not intend to execute

31 Sir Thomas Roe, *The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe in his Embassy to the Ottoman Porte from the Year 1621 to 1628* (London, 1740), 50-1; see also Samuel Purchas, *Purchas, His Pilgrims in Five Books* (London, 1625), vol. 2, 1375.

32 Among his claims are: "the King might under the shadow of a holy pilgrimage, goe out with a small trayne, and disperse those who were suspected to him. And for his preparation was made, but somewhat too grosly by melting of all the Plate, Saddles, furniture of house, Lamps of Churhes, and whatsoever could more easily be conveyed away in metal, with all the Jewels and treasure. This gave the first suspicion, which was confirmed by divers unadvised words let fall from the King, of disdayne against the cowardize of the Ianizaries, and that he would shortly find himselfe soldiers that should whip them; and lastly, dismissing all his household, except some few elect, the discontented observed and betrayed him. Delaur Bassa, kept his owne secret, and in the meane time prepared by his friends in Asia 10000 about Damascus, 10000 from the Coords, besides those in the readinesse of the Emir de Zaida, and all upon pretense of defending the borders of Persia, who having intelligence of some change in those parts; and gave order that all these should meet the King at Damascus, where he would presently cut off his Guard, and stay there, untill he had regulated his new Armie, and discipline and then to returne

the Sultan whom they considered almost holy, but that the inexperienced Sultan, even though with good intentions to reform a “lazy army,” was too quick to execute his plan and was in fact the victim of ill advice. Despite his overconfident tone in his account, Roe does not undermine the role of rumors circulating in the city, and warns his readers about the anarchy that can ensue from uncertainty. Why?

In Middle English (as well as medieval and early-modern French) rumor did not only mean “an unsubstantiated report” but also “outcry of protests or disapproval” and “disturbance, stir, tumult,”³³ a range of meanings carried over to the modern times.³⁴ More to the point is the fact that “fame” (*fama*) was almost indistinguishable from rumor for the early modern audience. When Francis Bacon included an essay entitled “A Fragment of An Essay on Fame” in his 1625 edition of *The Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral, Newly Enlarged*, he, in fact, discussed the role of rumor in the body politic. As Botelho argues, “for Bacon in the early decades of the seventeenth century, rumor – so diffuse, so threatening – was a pressing social and political concern. The way to this sort of discernment that Bacon insists upon is through enhanced sensory activity; in order to “check” and “lay dead” rumors, set forth on the tongue and containing both truth and falsity, the ears must be on guard.”³⁵ There was, then, an intellectual and political context which made the English observers of the Ottoman Empire to pay particular attention to that which seemed to be elusive or ungrounded. But they were not alone to foresee the outcome of the ill advices, or to take seriously the intelligence they gathered from among the various groups.

II.

When we turn to the principal text of the incident, Tuđi’s “Vak’a-i Sultan Osman” it should be mentioned at the outset that to confine oneself to

triumphant to Constantinople, and utterly root out the order of Ianizaries, Spahies, and Timariots, and to exauctorate all their Captaines and Officers to settle a new government, and to change name of the Citie,” Roe, *Negotiations*, 49; Purchas, *Pilgrims*, 1374.

33 *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor, 1985); for the etymological background of the word in the French context see Aldrin, *Sociologie politique des rumeurs*, 18-21.

34 *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1989).

35 Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses*, 2.

one single text/edition may be misleading; Tuğî's text was edited later, and there were significant revisions in the later versions.³⁶ As far as explicit references to the rumors circulating in the city are concerned, two of the three texts used here do not refer to the news that had already been spreading around to inform the *kul* about the intentions of the Sultan before the tumultuous three days which started on May 18, 1622.³⁷ However, another text translated, edited and published by M.A Danon and attributed to Tuğî by Tezcan, starts the narrative before the gathering of the *kul*.³⁸

In any case, it is significant that Tuğî starts the narrative of the events by referring to “those who are well informed” (*muharrir-i kelimât ve mukarrir-i risalât vukûfi olanlardan rivâyet ider kim*),³⁹ but does not further specify his sources. He proceeds to explain that the chief black eunuch, Süleyman Aga, and the mentor of the Sultan, Hoca Ömer Efendi, taking advantage of their proximity to the Sultan, advised him to go to Anatolia, to recruit a new army of *sekbans* from among the “Turks” and “Turkomans,” and then crush the *kul*. Furthermore, Tuğî's text also contains one of the most im-

36 For a comparative reading of the 15 different “versions” of Tuğî, see, Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” 268-300. More importantly, to see how Tuğî's account evolved in response to the changing circumstances, see Baki Tezcan, “The history of a <primary source:> The making of Tûghî's chronicle on the regicide of Osman II,” *Bulletin of SOAS* 72 (2009): 41-62.

37 Three texts were available to me: Mithat Sertoğlu (ed.), “Tuğî Tarihi,” *Belleten* 11 (1947): 489-514 [Tuğî – Sertoğlu hereafter]; Fahir İz (ed.), “Eski Düzyazının Gelişimi: XVII. Yüzyılda Halk Dili ile Yazılmış Bir Tarih Kitabı: Hüseyin Tuğî, Vaka-i Sultan Osman Han,” *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı – Belleten* (1967): 119-64 [Tuğî – İz hereafter].

38 M.A Danon (ed., tr.), “Contribution a l'histoire des Sultans Osman II et Moustafa I,” *Journal Asiatique*, 11eme Serie 14 (1919): 69-139 [77-126], 243-310 [254-96] [Tuğî – Danon hereafter]; and according to a careful textual analysis and comparison of the extant manuscripts of Tuğî's history, the text published by Danon is more reliable than the other two.

39 Tuğî – Danon, 256. Danon translates the formula as “d'apres les (gens bien) informés, (moi) l'auteur de (ces) paroles et redacteur de cette brochure, je rapporte que ... ;” Tuğî – Danon, 79. Danon reports that the above mentioned lines were underlined with red ink in the original manuscript. Danon preferred to underline them in his publication, too. For a comparison with the other manuscripts see, Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” 270-83 (for instance the Leiden manuscript reads: “*muharrir-i kelimât ve mukarrir-i risalât vukûfi olan erbâb-i makalât rivâyet ider kim;*” cited in *ibid.*, 402, n. 28).

portant pieces of evidence as to the real intentions of the Sultan: a certain Yusuf, a halberdier from the Old Palace, was dispatched to Aleppo under the pretext of supplying provisions for the Sultan's pilgrimage, whereas his real mission was to make the necessary preparations to recruit a new army of *sekbans* before the Sultan makes his move to Anatolia.

Later on, we learn that the *beylerbeyis* of the different regions also receive orders, through the emissaries, to recruit *sekbans* and wipe out the *kul*. In Tuđı's account it is upon hearing this particular news that the *kul* decides to take action. The critical passage reads: "bundan ma'ada nice beylerbeyilere emr varıd olmuř idi kim kapukulun kırup sekban yazalar deyü her canibe ademler gitmiřtir deyü haberler řâyi' olmađla kul tai'fesi hareket eyleyüb yevm-i mezkûrda cem'ıyyet-i azım ile Karamana [near the Et Meydanı] çıkub."⁴⁰ It is with the spread of this news that the incident proper begins; in a sense, rumor sets the crowd in motion (and it is important to note that this is not described as a rebellion). As we will see, the formula "and news are heard that" ("*bir haber [or haberler] řâyi' oldu ki*") is used in the narrative a few more times but especially at those moments when there seems to be a relative quiet after the turmoil; that is, whenever there was time to think, evaluate the situation, negotiate and come up with alternative political actions.⁴¹

Upon hearing the news, the *kul* first gather near their barracks, then go to the Hippodrome to demand the cancellation of the pilgrimage and

40 Tuđı – Danon, 258; Danon translates this section as follows: "De plus, des rumeurs se repandirent que plusieurs Beylerbeys avaient, par des emissaries venus partout, recu l'ordre d'aneantir la garde imperiale et d'engager des Segbans. De la le movement du corps des Kouls qui, ce jour-la, sortirent au Caraman en foule compacte....," 82. Compare this to the Leiden manuscript which reads: "ve bundan ma'ada nice beylerbeğilere ve sancak beğlere emr olmus idi kim kapukulun kırılar ve sekban ve cundi yazalar deyü her canibden bu haberler gün be-gün řâyi' olmakta idi;" cited in Tezcan, "Searching for Osman," 402, n. 30.

41 The formula is usually the same in most of the chroniclers. But sometimes, as in the case of Solakzâde's history, the same section reads: "sekban yazalar deyü etraf ve cevanib-i erba'aya sipariř olduđundan kul taifesi haberdar olub," *Solakzâde Tarihi* (Istanbul, 1298), 705. Even though the ambiguity of the situation does not change much with this revision, the use of the "haberdâr olmak" poses problems as far as the translation is concerned. In the case of "haberler řâyi oldu ki," we may, at least, plausibly use rumor but in the latter case, the translation would be more correct if it read "and the *kul* was informed that," which changes the meaning.

the execution of the chief black eunuch, Süleyman Ağa. In order to legitimize their request, they also secure a *fetva*, a legal opinion, from the Şeyhülislam Esat Efendi. The day continues with the crowd going to the residence of Ömer Efendi; and even though their intention seems to ask him to convince the Sultan to cancel his pilgrimage, upon hearing the *kul* shouting outside, Ömer Efendi fears for his life and escapes his residence upon which the crowd pillages his palace. Then comes Dilaver Pasha's turn: when the crowd moves to his palace, however, Pasha's men resist the crowd and attack and kill some of them with arrows. Being unarmed the *kul* retreats and goes to the "Cavalry Bazaar" to procure arms but after the shopkeepers persuade them that they should not enter the bazaar, they disperse thinking that the night is about to fall anyway.

The night falls, and apparently the city falls quiet. But only apparently, since two crucial episodes are recounted in the histories to give a sense that mutual suspect and fear based on further rumors were in fact reigning supreme. In Danon's edition of Tuğî, the author, once more, explicitly refers to the other hearsays ("*rivâyet*") according to which the Sultan tears apart the *fetva* written by Esad Efendi ("*Sultan fetvayı paraladı deyü rivâyet ederler*") which stipulates that the pilgrimage is not necessary for the Sultan. However, it seems that after this act of "resistance" to the *fetva* (and hence Islamic law), the Sultan also says that he gives up the idea of pilgrimage ("*padişah gitmeden ferâgat eyledüm deyüp*"),⁴² thus implying that he may be ready to find a ground for reconciliation. Tezcan also points out that "although Osman II might well have threatened the mevâlî, the fact that he dismissed the grand vizier Dilaver Pasha and appointed Hüseyin Pasha in his stead suggests that he was ready to negotiate."⁴³ This, however, does not prevent the *kul* to gather even a larger crowd the next day and press further with petitions asking for the execution of six important figures that they think are responsible for the decision of the Sultan and their misery. In order to make a better sense of the rumors flying in the night, let us, at this point, leave Danon's edition of Tuğî, and refer to the other editions of Tuğî by Mithat Sertoğlu and Fahir İz as well as to Solakzâde and Kâtip Çelebi.⁴⁴

42 Tuğî – Danon, 260-1.

43 Tezcan, "Searching for Osman," 232.

44 This does mean that Solakzâde or Katip Çelebi contain something that cannot be found in the different versions of Tuğî. As my purpose is not a critical edition of the different Tuğî histories, especially with only three versions available, it is

III.

Both Solakzâde and Kâtip Çelebi recount that, the same night, a news is heard that (“*bir haber şâyi oldu ki*”) Sultan Osman gathered his gardeners and distributed them weapons to wipe out the *kul*. But at the same time, another news reaches the gardeners that the *kul*, especially the navy, prepares an attack with canons from the sea while those in the city are ready to launch an attack from the land. Upon this news both sides spend the night with groundless fears (“*bu haberler zuhûr edüb tarafeyn vehm üzere oldılar*”).⁴⁵ Apart from the differences in the flow of the narrative and some minor differences in the sentences, as far as the definition of the rumor is concerned, the Tuği versions state that “a word appeared among the crowd that (“*cumhur arasında bir söz peydâ oldu ki*”).⁴⁶ Let us note in passing that the term “*cumhur*” is an interesting choice in that in addition to its meanings as “crowd, people or a commonwealth,” it also means “a state of anarchy” or “a people in a state of anarchy.”⁴⁷ What is, then, the exact connection between “*cumhur*” and “*söz (peydâ oldu ki)*”? The overlap between crowd, noise, and rumor is quite well-established in the early modern European context. Was there a similar hermeneutic context for the early modern Ottomans in which “*cumhur*” and “*söz*” were complementary terms? Was the intention of the author to show that there already existed a state of anarchy so that the word – hearsay – could easily circulate? Or was it the hearsay that created the state of anarchy? Whatever the answers may be for these questions, it was certain that the silence that fell on the city was deceptive; the next morning, within the same crowd, this time not at rest, but in full motion, another word, this time much louder, yet always unidentified, was to be decisive for the fate of the Sultan.

IV.

The next morning, on May 19, 1622, the crowd, much bigger than the day before, and this time armed, meets near the New Barracks (Yeni

simply necessary to turn to other accounts to see the degree to which different rumors were spreading and how they were presented in different texts. For a comparative reading of Tuği’s versions, see Tezcan, “Searching for Osman.”

45 Solakzâde, *Solakzâde Tarihi*, 708-9; Kâtip Çelebi, *Fezleke*, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 1286 – 87), vol. 2, 13.

46 Tuği – İz, 128 – 129; Tuği – Sertoğlu, 496.

47 Sir James Redhouse, *A Turkish and English Lexicon* (Beirut, 1890).

Odalar) and prays at the Mosque of Mehmed II from where they go to the Sultan Ahmed Mosque. Upon meeting the ulema, the crowd gives them a petition in which they request the execution of six men (including Süleyman Ağa, the chief black eunuch, Ömer Efendi, the mentor of the Sultan, Dilaver Pasha, the former grand vizier, along with Baki Pasha, the finance minister, Ahmed Pasha, the deputy to the grand vizier during the Hotin campaign, and Nasuh Ağa, one of the Janissary officers). Then the ulema and the viziers meet in the palace, while the crowd impatiently waits outside. After a while, the crowd decides to move on to the palace; yet still suspicious of the presence of the gardeners, they first decide to check the palace from the minarets of the Ayasofya mosque. Reassured that there is no one around, the crowd enters the palace, and passing the thresholds one by one, reaches the third courtyard. At this point there are different accounts of the negotiations between the Sultan, the ulema and the viziers. However, what is important for my purpose is that, apparently, the crowd's intention was no other than to find and punish the six men whose execution they petitioned for until another voice was heard from among them (“*bir söz peydâ oldu kim*”): “we want Sultan Mustafa according to the Holy law” (“*şer’le Sultan Mustafa’yı isteriz*”). After the crowd starts repeating it, that single voice whose source is not known, a voice that arises from within the multitude, finally, becomes the guiding principle of their action. The *kul* moves on, finds Sultan Mustafa in one of the rooms in the harem, and takes an oath of allegiance to him.⁴⁸

When, on the other hand, Sultan Osman delivers Dilaver Pasha and Süleyman Ağa to the crowd, it proves be too late for him. The crowd also forces the ulema, which seems to be reluctant to take the oath of allegiance, to give their consent and take the oath, and then takes Sultan Mustafa to the Old Palace. Nevertheless, this is not the end of all hopes of negotiation and compromise between the *kul* and Sultan Osman – until another rumor makes such a compromise, if not impossible, all the more difficult.

48 Tuğî – Danon, 265; Tuğî – Sertoglu, 497; Tuğî – İz, 130; Solakzâde, *Solakzâde Tarihi*, 712, Katip Çelebi, *Fezleke*, vol. 2, 15. The section in Solakzâde, for instance, reads: “ol zamanda cemi’yyet arasında bir sada peydâ oldu kim şer’ ile Sultan Mustafa Hanı isteriz deyü üç kere na’ra urub lakin kesretten na’ra-i avaz kim oldugunu bilmediler hikmet-i yezdani bu söz cem’-i kesretin lisanına cari olub cümlesi na’aralar urub şer’le Sultan Mustafa Hanı isteriz deyü tekrar na’ralar urdular.”

After Sultan Mustafa is taken to the Old Palace in the afternoon of the second day, other news spread that, this time, Sultan Osman, again with the gardeners, intends to attack the Old Palace and kill Sultan Mustafa. This news leads the *kul* to transfer Sultan Mustafa from the Old Palace to a much safer place, the Orta Mosque, the mosque of the janissary barracks.⁴⁹ This news is also preceded, in some of the accounts (and sometimes with a different chronological order), with another news; that Sultan Osman appoints Kara Ali Ağa as the head of the janissaries on the condition that he should take Sultan Mustafa from the hands of the janissaries and wipe them out gradually. In Solakzâde, for instance, the news of the appointment takes place before the news of the attack to the Old Palace, probably to substantiate the argument that Sultan Osman was still stubbornly pursuing his aim by appointing someone who is not respected by the janissaries.⁵⁰ Ali Ağa's palace is then pillaged but he manages to run away.

The position of the newly appointed Janissary Ağa is, however, ambiguous. Apparently, Sultan Mustafa also confirms his appointment but this time there is no resistance from the *kul*. What is more, Ali Ağa decides to wait until the dust settles, and there are repeated attempts to convince him that he should accept the position. At the end Ali Ağa is convinced and goes to see Sultan Mustafa. Meanwhile upon the advice of his newly appointed grand vizier, Hüseyin Pasha, Sultan Osman decides to make one more attempt to win the *kul* over to his side by bribing them through the head of the janissaries. When Ali Ağa returns from the headquarters of the janissaries, he finds Sultan Osman and his vizier waiting for him. The narratives are not very clear at this point but it seems that he agrees to help Sultan Osman. However, the next day, he tries in vain and is slain by the *kul*. Finally, Osman II is also captured by the *kul* and is sent to Yedikule to be strangled at night upon the orders of the newly appointed Davud Pasha. Along with the Sultan, also die the rumors. This is the story of rumor in the

49 Tuğı – Danon, 269; Tuğı – Sertoglu, 499; Tuğı – İz, 133; Solakzâde, *Solakzâde Tarihi*, 715.

50 The section in Solakzâde reads: “bir haber şâyı oldu kim Sultan Osman yeniçeri ağalığını kapucı başı Kara Ali ağaya vermiş denildikte kul taifesi Sultan Osman Han vergisine razı olmayub ağayı sevmedikleri eelden ağalığa kabul etmeyüb ... ve mezbur Ali Ağa Sultan Osman yanında bulunub ağalığı şol şart ile kabul eyledi ki Sultan Mustafayı kul elinden ala ve tedric ile kul taifesinin haklarından gele;” *Solakzâde Tarihi*, 714.

kul-centric narratives influenced by Tuği's account. Let us now turn to an alternative account, that of Peçevi.

V.

Peçevi also starts his account of the event by indicating that “some people were already saying that because the chief black eunuch said that it was meritorious deed (*sevab*), the real intention of the Sultan was to make Cairo the capital of the realm,” and goes on to give a highly suggestive account of the early stages of the incident. It is worth mentioning that Peçevi's text entitles this section: “strange (or curious) judgments” (*garâibü'l-akhâm*).⁵¹ This strange (or curious) instance occurs when Peçevi, as an employee at the finance department, witnesses the preparations for the alleged pilgrimage of the Sultan. While sitting in the presence of Baki Pasha, the finance minister of Osman II, with his son-in-law Ramazan Çavuş and watching the tents being loaded to start the “pilgrimage campaign,” the chief astrologer (*müneccimbaşı*) Mehmed Çelebi appears. Peçevi and Ramazan Çavuş invite him to join them upon which Mehmed Çelebi asserts that “they bother themselves for nothing.” When Peçevi and Ramazan Çavuş ask “but what may happen after this? The tents of our Sultan have already been carried over and loaded, how is it possible that they won't go?” Mehmed Çelebi replies that “they did not go before; this one will not go either.” Apparently, both surprised and curious, Peçevi and his son-in-law Ramazan Çavuş nevertheless insist that the campaign could well take place. At that point another employee of the finance department rushes in and informs those who are present that a large crowd gathered at the Süleymaniye Mosque. He tells them that “it was as if the whole world got together at the headquarters of the janissaries.” Upon hearing the news, Mehmed Çelebi repeats his claim: “Did I not tell you? Wait and see what will happen next.” Even more surprised, Peçevi asks whether or not “there is a possibility of grief for the Sultan.” In his reply, the chief astrologer asserts that even though he does not know what is going to happen next, “the Sultan can not make [the month of] Ramadan.” Peçevi, then, inquires the source of his information and begs him to explain why he reached such a conclusion. Mehmed Çelebi this time evades the question and denies that he has any reliable source for his claims. Then, probably in an attempt to end the conversation, the chief astrologer says: “Sometimes I talk unrea-

51 İbrahim Peçevi, *Tarih-i Peçevi*, 2 vols. (Istanbul, 1281-83), vol. 2, 381.

sonably; as the Persians say, I talk nonsense (*herze-gûyluk*).” Finally, when pressed further, Mehmed Çelebi refers to celestial signs and gives a short explanation based on the eclipse of the sun implying that Sultan Osman’s ill fate was sealed when he was born.⁵²

In this brief account of Peçevi, the silences are as significant as the final explanation based on the eclipse of the sun. The passage gives the reader the sense that Mehmed Çelebi definitely knew something and was hiding it.⁵³ It reads as if he first lets important information slip out, and when pressed to reveal his source(s), he changes the tunes and takes refuge in astrology, a realm where further investigation, at least for Peçevi, is not easy to pursue. But as far as explicit references to rumor are concerned there is nothing in the rest of the text that is even remotely similar to Tuğî’s account. In Peçevi’s narrative rumor does not play a role; the actions of the *kul* are unmediated, as it were, by any other factor than their own choices. Thus the *kul* is held responsible for the anarchy that ensues.

VI.

It is well established by Piterberg that Kâtip Çelebi had both Tuğî’s and Peçevi’s works available to him but he opted for the former perspective with occasional and unacknowledged references to Peçevi.⁵⁴ Therefore, comparing a specific section such as “the curious judgments” of Mehmet Çelebi in Peçevi and Kâtip Çelebi can illustrate how the details play out the underlying assumptions of the overall interpretations. For instance, when we turn to Kâtip Çelebi’s account of the same scene, we don’t see any reference to Mehmed Çelebi’s hesitation or to his “talking nonsense;” self confident and wise, the chief astrologer simply observes the efforts to move the tents and claims that they are in vain.⁵⁵ Kâtip Çelebi must

52 Ibid., vol. 2, 381-2.

53 Let us note that Müneccimbaşı Mehmed Çelebi was known to “wander about in the common way” (*sûret-i avâmda geşt ü gûzar edip*). Even though this is noted by Kâtip Çelebi rather than Peçevi, the chances are that Peçevi (and probably his audience) knew about Mehmed Çelebi’s reputation. Hence, there is another reason to suspect that the “word” was out and circulating about the possibility of an uprising. This particular reference is from Marinós Sariyannis, “>Mob,< <Scamps,> and Rebels in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul: Some Remarks on Ottoman Social Vocabulary,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 11 (2005): 1-16, at 6.

54 Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*, 92, 113-20.

55 Kâtip Çelebi, *Fezleke*, vol. 2, 16.

have thought it more appropriate, for his own purposes, not to include any doubts as to the wisdom of the chief astrologer. Therefore, by passing Peçevi's first-hand account over in silence, Kâtip Çelebi also leaves out any suggestions as to the intentions of the *kul* before the protests get out of control, and perhaps hopes to give further legitimacy to the regicide with reference to astrology. That is to say, this silence relegates any premeditated intention to depose the king (or for that matter, any plan to murder and replace him) to the background, and represents the event as the inescapable unfolding of the unfortunate fate of Osman II.⁵⁶ In short, in Kâtip Çelebi's story, not a single doubt is raised before rumor takes over and paves the way to the radicalization of the uprising.⁵⁷

Given the fact that Kâtip Çelebi opted for Tuğî's perspective for his overall interpretation, his highly selective use of Peçevi's text in this instance is natural. But the significance of Kâtip Çelebi's text in Ottoman historiography goes beyond a matter of choice. As Piterberg demonstrates Kâtip Çelebi's account (with Na'îmâ's approval) becomes the official narrative of the Ottoman state and gives the incident its name that would mark the collective memory of the Ottomans: Hâ'ile-i Osmaniye, which Piterberg translates as "an Ottoman tragedy."⁵⁸ Thus, not only alternative accounts such as Peçevi's are pushed to the background but Kâtip Çelebi's re-ordering of Tuğî's text also substantially changes the medium and the meaning of the narrative.

It can, then, be put forward that rumor is a sub-text in this overall scheme of the narratives; in the *kul*-centric texts, the rumor effaces most, if not all, of the traces of premeditation on the part of the *kul* and reduces

56 Piterberg draws attention to a prevalent theme in Ottoman historiography, that of "preordained and divinely guided inevitability;" Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*, 88.

57 It is interesting to note that Bekir Kütükoğlu in his study on the sources of *Fezleke* mentions both Tuğî and Peçevi as two of the most important sources of Kâtip Çelebi. Especially, Peçevi was highly praised by Kâtip Çelebi. Kütükoğlu refers to the exact section on the chief astrologer to show the influence of Peçevi on Kâtip Çelebi. However, Kütükoğlu does not see Kâtip Çelebi's omitting a large portion of the account as a critical revisionist move, but asserts that Kâtip Çelebi's summary accounts of Peçevi sometime lead to ambiguity; Bekir Kütükoğlu, *Katip Çelebi'nin Fezlekesinin Kaynakları* (Istanbul, 1974), 26 – 31.

58 Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*; for the translation, see 1-2; for the foundations of the official state narrative, see Chapter 6.

their intentions to mere contingency. It is as if rumor engulfs the past tensions and reproduces them unexpectedly and yet unfailingly in the most fleeting moments of the uprising. At the most crucial moments, when there is relative calm and an opportunity for negotiation and settlement, it gives the *kul* a reason to radicalize their demands, and mobilizes them step by step towards the deposition and the regicide. In Peçevi's explanation of the events, on the contrary, rumor does not play a role, but the readers are left with a sense of premeditation on the part of the *kul*, a well-thought out strategy to depose the Sultan, if not to kill him. The fact that Peçevi's history, as the only alternative account, was almost totally disregarded by the *kul*-centric narratives which became the state narrative in the eighteenth century is significant because the tensions between the two versions were sealed for a long time, leaving the act of regicide with a highly ambivalent interpretation as to the role of the perpetrators.

The silence of the political treatises on the act of regicide and on the resistance to the authority of the sultan makes the task of the modern scholars even more difficult. Tezcan argues that the absence of conceptual or theoretical discussions after the regicide is puzzling; even though there was a political vocabulary to justify their resistance (depicting Osman II as “*zalim*” for instance), the royal prerogative was only latently questioned with reserved references to *kanun*.⁵⁹ *Kanun* was often invoked as the ideological convention to justify or criticize change and hold the Sultan and his immediate circle accountable. A proper discussion of the uses of *kanun* is beyond the limits of this paper, but a bold conjecture would be that the Ottoman intelligentsia was too aware of the ambivalence rooted in the historiographical tradition that they never quite knew how to frame and conceptually discuss the act of regicide; in the absence of agents who can take responsibility for the consequences of their action, it might have proved very difficult to locate resistance in a grounded theory of right, whether that right is formulated within the parameters of *kanûn*, sharia, or *örf*. In short, rumor, while relieving the *kul* from the burden of responsibility opened a remarkably big lacuna for theoretical discussions. Leaving some of the issues raised by this discussion of the interplay between history and historiography to concluding remarks, let us now follow more closely the rumors flying around and the news that set the crowd in motion.

59 Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” 261.

Observations

“[It] is precisely on the spatial non-presence of others that hearsay, the medium of rumor is based. It always cites those who are not there at that moment. In the rumor the absent crowd speaks, its members only become visible in allegory.”⁶⁰

The source:

For the chroniclers who follow Tuğı, rumor constantly defies a search for a source; it excludes, throws out, and rejects any name that can be associated with it. The intermediaries (the heads of the janissaries, the headman of the bazaar) cannot penetrate the mass of the *kul*. The crowd throws stones, pillages, murders, writes petitions and negotiates without a single leader clearly emerging from its core. Even the ulema, which the *kul* relies upon for legitimacy, is often threatened and kept at a distance. This narrative minimizes the tensions within their ranks and represents them as unanimously acting upon the hearing of the news that threatens their existence. Furthermore, as I have tried to point out, every time there is a break in this constant move, a new rumor creeps in and moves the crowd yet again. It is as if their actions are not preceded by deliberations but by a void at the background of which lies a rumor. But does this mean that there was no plausible ground whatsoever for the worries, anxieties and the fears of the *kul*?

Tezcan notes that in one of the versions of Tuğı “on Tuesday, May 17, 1622, the müfti Esad Efendi, who had recently become the father-in-law of the Sultan, sent a note to the generals of the six divisions that made up the cavalry troops. Apparently this note informed them that once the Sultan had crossed over to Anatolia for his “pilgrimage campaign,” they were not going to be able to receive salaries anymore as the Sultan was taking the treasury with him. Moreover, Esad Efendi allegedly advised the cavalry troops to stop the Sultan while they could. It was this note that moved the cavalry soldiers to go to the barracks of the janissaries the next morning in order to persuade them to take a joint action.”⁶¹ The diplomatic dispatches of the French and English ambassadors which report about the grievances

⁶⁰ Neubauer, *The Rumour*, 29.

⁶¹ Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” 230; Tezcan also notes that there is another source which does not mention Esad Efendi but recounts that the soldiers received a

of the soldiers before the incident do not provide any conclusive evidence for the secret plans of Osman II, but give at least a good idea about the heightened tension in the capital. For one, Thomas Roe explicitly argues that the *kul* had secret intelligence upon the Sultan.⁶² Following some of the clues in Tuđi's account also lent credibility to the rumors. For instance, Tezcan suggests that Yusuf, the halberdier, for whom the rumor says that he was sent to Aleppo with the order to start the preparations for the recruitment of a new army, "must have been a man trusted in court circles and recommended to the Sultan" and that he was "experienced in dealing both with money and nomads, an obvious source for recruitment." What is more, contrary to the reports that the initial intention of the Sultan was to put down the rebellion of the Druze leader in Lebanon, there seems to be no significant tension but a window of opportunity for mobilizing a variety of forces for alliance in the Asian lands of the Empire.⁶³

If it can safely be argued that the *kul* had good reasons to give credence to the half-truths, it is also possible to do a cross reading of the narratives of rumor to see the extent to which the rumors did have a plausibility for the other side, that is, the Sultan and his "inner circle." If rumor is the ungrounded and ambiguous information about a subject as vital as the intentions of the ruler, then it becomes all the more important to distinguish between accurate information and inaccurate speculation. What is at stake here is no small matter. Hence, the critical function of earwitnessing – just as the visual metaphor of the camera can help to identify particular perspectives of the Ottoman historians,⁶⁴ earwitnessing can also be used in a

note informing them about Osman II's intentions to burn the archive (*defterhâne*) containing the records of the fiefs and other privileges.

62 Roe, *Negotiations*, 45; see also the news in , *The Strangling and Death of the Great Turk* (London, 15 July 1622) reprinted in *The Harleian Miscellany*, vol. 4 (London, 1745), 32-40, especially on Esad Efendi spreading the rumor, 39-40.

63 Tezcan, "Searching for Osman," 225-6.

64 My reference here is to G. Piterberg; "the most fundamental latent characteristic, and one which might be mistakenly disregarded on the manifest level, of the perception of space in the Hâile-i Osmaniyye is the viewpoint through which most of the event is actually seen: namely the eyes of the Kul. This characteristic of Tuđi's text can be better clarified if we borrow our notion of perspective from the domain of filmmaking. Each scene in the Hâile-i Osmaniyye offers more than one possible spot where the director's seat or the lead camera can be poised and the 'take' can be shot. Yet under Tuđi's direction, almost every scene is 'filmed' with

similar way and be assessed both as a practice and a marker of particular spaces. As a practice, it can reveal the extent to which the spread of news relied on oral communication; and as a marker of specific places, it can help to reconstruct the different functions of public and private spaces.⁶⁵ In reconstructing the earwitnessing practices and spaces, the ideal for the historian would be to have as many angles as possible in order to create a grid upon which rumor could be situated and the points of intersection marked. It would, then, be possible, at least partially, to understand how a specific rumor spreads, how it is “heard” at different points by different audiences, and how its transformation is related to the mobilization of the crowd. With the available sources, however, we seem to have only a few angles; those of Tuđı (and his “followers”) and Peçevi.

The space:

One of the interesting aspects of the “presentation” of rumor by the chroniclers is that it is confined to a very restricted space: it is as if this aerial figure is entrapped in a space between the janissary barracks, their neighborhood, and the palaces (Topkapı and the Old).⁶⁶ True; in Thomas Roe’s dispatches there is reference to the “city” itself but no specific place or name is mentioned, and it is highly likely that Roe must have gathered his information through some of the janissaries, or someone from the Palace. As for Tuđı, Solakzâde, Kâtip Çelebi or Peçevi, rumor is always heard either within the Palace, or within the neighborhoods where the *kul* live and train. This may seem only too natural and evident given the fact that this was a struggle (and the narrative of that struggle) between the *kul* and Osman II (and his “inner circle”), but self-evident truths tend to hide more than they reveal.

Modern scholarship on the janissaries amply demonstrated that the *kul* was not the ideal soldier of an idealized hierarchical society – training and living in their quarters with no intimate connection to the rest of the

the ‘lead camera’ situated behind or among the Kul;” G. Piterberg, “Speech Acts and Written Texts,” 403.

65 For most of these themes, and the gender dimension see, Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses*.

66 For the iconography and the mythology of rumor in the Western context, see Neubauer, *The Rumour*; and Marcel Detienne, “La Rumeur, elle aussi, est une déesse,” in *La Rumeur*, 71 – 81.

population. Especially after the mid-sixteenth century, the connection of the janissaries to the urban space was very strong, and they were immediately implicated in the political life of some of the major cities.⁶⁷ As active participants in both the urban and the rural economy, the *kul* had much to lose and gain. For instance, leaving aside the close relationship between the janissaries and some of the guilds, it is now well established that a good number of the coffeehouses, the ideal space for talk and gossip, were owned and run by the janissaries and that the monetization of the economy accelerated the integration of the *kul* into the social and economic realm. The changing social composition of the janissaries “was accompanied by related developments, which worked in combined fashion to weave the peculiar social fabric of the city in the pre-Tanzimat era: an unprecedented growth in the city size as well as in specific components such as the numbers of Sufi lodges, of waqf establishments and their employees, of public baths and fountains; the systematization of a professional guild framework; the increasing participation of women in public life; the invention and proliferation of coffeehouses; new means of socialization and a newly-found readiness for self-assertion.”⁶⁸ This process of amalgamation lies at the background of some of the tensions among the different actors competing for their share for keeping and consolidating their privileges: the regicide being perhaps one of the moments of settling the accounts.⁶⁹ It may, then, be argued that an idealized separation between the *kul* and the rest of the urban population, not only in terms of space but also in terms of interests, would be highly unconvincing for the chroniclers’ contemporaries, too. After all, one of the main complaints of “the Ottoman observers of the Ottoman decline” was the swelling number of the *kul*, and the blurring of the lines between the military class and the *re’aya*. Furthermore if the rumors

67 Cemal Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul,” in *Identity and Identity Formation in the Ottoman World: A Volume of Essays in Honor of Norman Itzkowitz*, eds. Baki Tezcan and Karl K. Barbir (Madison, 2007), 113-34; see also C. Kafadar, “On the Purity and Corruption of the Janissaries,” *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 15 (1991): 273-80. For a more recent account, see Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul* (Cambridge, 2010).

68 Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul,” 119.

69 For the importance of the process of the monetization of the economy and its effects on the military strata, see Tezcan, “Searching for Osman,” especially chapters 1 and 3.

of the Sultan leaving the city and even further the rumors to the effect that he would change the capital are true, there is all the reason for a large part of the city, especially those with a vested interest in the economic realm, to side with the *kul*. As future protests would demonstrate, the Sultan's absence from the city would create great anxiety for the people of Istanbul.⁷⁰ As this process of integration attests, it is hard to believe that rumor would be spatially confined within the realms of the military class - unless the chroniclers use the rumor as an ideological device in their narratives.⁷¹

Nevertheless, there are two specific instances when and where we hear about the involvement of the "civilians" ("*şehirlü*"). The first instance occurs when the *kul* finally decides to move into the palace. Upon entering the palace, the *kul* turns to the *şehirlü* among them and tell them to leave, arguing that the Sultan is upset by their disobedience but that their sole purpose is to punish those who mislead the Sultan. The *kul* also argues that should there be a clash between them and the gardeners of the palace, the *şehirlü* will only be a hindrance for them upon which the *şehirlü* reply that they would stand by the *kul*.⁷² After this instance, until Sultan Mustafa is taken to the Old Palace, the *şehirlü* disappears from the narrative. The relation of the *kul* to the *şehirlü* is, therefore, ambivalent at best. Even though the narratives talk about the "crowd" running from one place to another like a flood or "as if the world had gathered together," the real crowd that acts is the *kul*.

The second reference is when there is a hint of a certain tension between the *kul* and the shop owners, when at the end of the first day, the shop owners, fearing a general sack of their shops, oppose the *kul*'s request to enter the bazaar to procure arms. Therefore, the impression we are left

70 Vatin and Veinstein argue that the rumor about the change of the capital might have been the principal cause for the "*şehirlü*" siding with the *Kul*, Vatin and Veinstein, *Le Sérail ébranlé*, 226.

71 Leaving aside the usual suspects, the coffeehouses and the military quarters, even the mosques were seen as potential places for "seditious rumor;" see Boyar and Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, 44.

72 This instance is more detailed in Solakzâde, *Solakzâde Tarihi*, 711, than it is in Kâtip Çelebi, *Fezleke*, vol. 2, 14. Kâtip Çelebi recounts that when the crowd enters the palace, the *kul* simply asks the *şehirlü* to leave, upon which the *şehirlü* insists to stand by the *kul*. And there is nothing on this particular episode in Tuği – Sertoğlu, or Tuği – İz.

with, especially after the episode in the palace, is that despite a potential tension, the *şehirlü* standing by the *kul* gives further legitimacy to their actions.⁷³ But when it comes to a general assessment of the whole event after the strangling of Sultan Osman II, Tuği is much more explicit in his critique of an alliance between the *kul* and the shop owners, artisans, and the guild members in the bazaar.⁷⁴

Apparently, now lamenting the murder of the Sultan, Tuği refers to the *kul* and criticizes them for not being able to foresee that the Sultan might have been murdered. Tuği insists that there were hints that the *kul* should have better judged the situation and acted accordingly to prevent a general disorder, and more importantly the regicide. The relations between the *kul* and the *esnaf* were much more complicated than a mere alliance or conflict. Even though the gist of the *kul*-centric narratives based on Tuği ultimately justifies the uprising of the *kul*, the authors are conscious not to overstep the boundaries of what is admissible within conventional Ottoman political thinking (or for that matter Islamic and maybe, to a certain extent, early modern), which does not tolerate the participation of the subjects into the realm of “government.”

“Government”:

Robert Darnton argues that in the early modern context, the way politics was institutionalized also determined the form and the content of different forms of information and clearly separated information pertinent to the realm of politics and government from others; “information about the inner workings of the power system was not supposed to circulate under the Old Regime in France. Politics was the king’s business, ‘le secret du roi’ – a notion derived from a late medieval and Renaissance view, which treated statecraft as ‘arcane imperii,’ a secret art restricted to sovereigns

73 Let us note here that Sir Thomas Roe is even more positive about the attitude of the *kul*: “...the mutineers having no head, or direction, kept that reglement, that tooke oath in their furie, in hot blood, in the Kings yard, not to dishonour, spoyle, nor sacke the Imperiall Throne, neither committed nor suffered any insolence nor violence in the Citie to the Neutrals, but rather proclaimed peace and iustice...at the third days end, all was quiet, and all men in their trade, as if no such thing had happened,” *Negotiations*, 49.

74 Ottoman social vocabulary testifies the extent to which such an alliance was difficult to maintain, at least, from an ideological perspective, Sariyannis, “>Mob,> <Scamps,> and Rebels.”

and their advisers.”⁷⁵ In short, in the power configurations of the early modern world, the scope of the information was strictly regulated according to the imperatives of the hierarchical formation of the society. Even though in practice the authority of the rulers was almost always open to negotiation, the ideological foundations of kingship were such that the sanction of the king was the basis of legitimacy for every social and political change. The particularist discourse and practice of law, that is, the “promulgation” of a decree for every particular case by the ruler, gave credence to the illusion that power emanated from a single core and strengthened the underlying assumptions about the centrality of the ruler. Complementing this view was a highly moralistic political language that identified the good government with the virtues and abilities of the king. The state was the institutionalized embodiment of the ruler or the dynasty, and politics was the realm that distinguished the privileged from the subjects; in this specific social and political formation, the circulation of information pertinent to the “government” was, therefore, the privilege of the few. France, in this respect, came to be seen as the “ideal type” of the absolutist state but the “secret art of ruling” was likewise prevalent in the English context whose parliamentary component had been much stronger. Even though the scope of the political participation was wider compared to France, as Michael Walzer points out, the political ideology of the “uniqueness” of the king was well entrenched in England, too (and could be easily used by a monarch such as James I for his claims of absolutism).⁷⁶

Similar observations can be made about the Islamic empires. In accordance with the premises of Islamic political thinking and theories of kingship, the rule of the Sultan (or the Caliph) was essential in order to impose an or-

75 Robert Darnton, “An Early Information Society: News and the Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 1-35, at 4.

76 “The king’s plans determined the actions of the state: state policy, one might say, was in the mind of the prince. A wise prince would consult with his subjects and especially with those whom he planned to act, but they had no political existence independent of his own. Nor had they any claim to know his innermost thoughts. These were mysteries of state, which only the head of state had the capacity to understand. Other men might have their trades and handicraft, but the trade of ruling belonged exclusively to the king, and here the others must bow to his wisdom, keeping ‘in their bounds,’ as James I told his Parliament, and never daring to ‘dispute what a king can do;’” Michael Walzer (ed.), *Regicide and Revolution: Speeches at the Trial of Louis XVI* (Cambridge, 1974), 23.

der to the natural condition of inequality and unevenness. Aziz al-Azmeh succinctly summarizes the extent to which the meaning of “politics” drew upon this assumption when he argues that “in order for natural differentiation to cohere into order, its elements need to be subject to politics: a form of husbandry, *siyâsa*, a term applied to both the management of humans and the husbandry of animals, also termed *tadbîr* in texts of a philosophical nature or utilizing philosophical vocabulary.”⁷⁷ This system of governance is also similar to the functioning of human body, and even though the heart, rather than the head, is more commonly used to emphasize the centrality of the Muslim king, “as the principal component in the body politic, the king is distinct from its other components and stands above their relations including their conformation into a body social: if they, in their functional interdependence and their hierarchy, constitute the body social, the existence of a king over and above their various networks constitutes them into a body politic, that is, one based on a principle of order.”⁷⁸

In the Ottoman political treatises of the “classical period,” too, the responsibility of good and just government lies principally with the Sultan. They constantly refer to him as the absolute center of authority whose power cannot be shared or delegated to anyone. Even when the advice literature spends considerable time to discuss the moral and intellectual qualities of the viziers or the advisers of the Sultan, the ultimate responsibility lies with the Sultan.⁷⁹ In a recent reevaluation of the Ottoman advice literature, Douglas A. Howard contends that post-1453 formulations of Ottoman kingship, by further emphasizing an ethic of personal justice, “sharpened the distinction between the monarch and his subjects.”⁸⁰ Therefore, the closer one got to the Sultan, the greater was the burden of responsibility; hence, the importance of the inner circle, and their own distance from the subjects.⁸¹ It is important to note that this ideological representation of the hier-

77 Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kinship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Politics* (London, 1997), 118.

78 Ibid, 119-20.

79 For a comparative reading of Lutfi Pasha, Mustafa Âli and especially Koçi Bey, see Rifa’at ‘Ali Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Albany, 1991), especially 20-40.

80 Douglas A. Howard, “The Ottoman advice for kings literature,” in *The Early Modern Ottomans*, 140.

81 It should nevertheless be noted that the “distance” might take different forms. It

archy and the distancing the Sultan from his subjects manifested itself in a variety of ways, including the “symbolic” and “ceremonial” organization of the state bureaucracy. In her work on the Topkapı Palace, Gülrü Necipoğlu showed the extent to which the organization of space in the palace reflected a certain understanding of political, social, and cultural power; the gradual distancing of the Sultan from his subjects with each imperial threshold also reflected the hierarchy of privileges prevalent in the society.⁸²

Most of the treaties on kingship do not only focus on the duties and the qualities of the viziers but also advise the rulers to keep this inner circle a closed one to outside influences. According to Lütü Pasha's *Asafnâme*, the grand vizier is expected to inform the Sultan of what he thinks is right without any reservations. Fittingly, the influential genre of memorandum written to the sultan by the grand vizier, start, in most of the cases, with “let it not be concealed that (*hafî olmaya ki*).”⁸³ The relation between the Sultan and the grand vizier is, nevertheless, a “closed” one, in the sense that their deliberation is to be kept secret even from the other low-ranking viziers. Furthermore, even though the Sultan cannot do without advisors or companions, these latter are not expected to get involved in the government. In this close circle of government, the grand vizier is the principle policy maker after the Sultan but not a substitute for him.⁸⁴ The idea that

is true that in some of the political tracts the Sultan would be criticized for leaving aside the “ancient” practice of participating at the meetings of the imperial council or hearing the complaints of the common people. This does not, however, amount to make the Sultan a “primus inter pares.” In many other ways the Sultan is high and above the rest of the society. For a good example including a criticism of the “physical” distancing of the Sultan and his “uniqueness,” see Mustafa Âli, *Nushatü's-selatin*, ed. and tr. Andreas Tietze: *Mustafa Âli's Counsel for Sultans of 1581* (Vienna, 1979-82) [Âli – Tietze hereafter].

82 Gülrü Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial, and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries* (Cambridge, MA, 1991).

83 Howard, “The Ottoman advice for kings literature,” 151.

84 Lütü Pasha, “Lütü Paşa Asafnâmesi: Yeni Bir Metin Tesisi Denemesi,” ed. M. Kütükoğlu, in *Prof. Dr. Bekir Kütükoğlu'na Armağan* (Istanbul, 1991), 49-99. The relevant passages read: “ve padişahile olan mukamelesin ve irada müte'allik musaveresin haricden değil belki sair vüzera bile bilmemek ve vakıf olmamak gerekdir” (62-63); “Ve Padişah nedimler ile ihtilât itmemek gerekdir. Mülük nedimsiz olmaz amma nedim ve musahib bahşişden ve hil'atden behredar olup mesalih-i halka karışmamak gerekdir” (64); “Nitekim vezir ma'nen hakim-i sahib-i tedbir gibidir. Vezir-i azam hükümde sahib-i tedbir gerekdir” (65).

the companions of the Sultans should be trustworthy is also pointed out by Mustafa Âli. In *Counsel for Sultans*, Âli asserts that “[the companion of the Sultan] has to have the manifest strength to keep the secrets of the state a secret, his trustworthiness and steadfastness in preserving the trust of what is spoken and heard has to be clear as the sun.”⁸⁵ It therefore seems that the distinctiveness of the Sultan is also premised on the idea that the rules of governing the subjects as well as any deliberation with the advisors are to be kept secret.

This in turn implies that the flow of information is always from the subjects to the Sultan, and not vice versa. Any reversal in this practice means transgressing the boundaries of established hierarchies of the political realm. Contemporary scholars have rarely touched upon this aspect of the “government,” but it seems plausible to argue that the distinctiveness of the Sultan also stems from his position in the flow of information. We do not know much about the control of the words, the circulation of the news, and how the control of information was ideologically articulated and actually implemented; but Mustafa Âli offers a hint when he argues that constant flow information from the spies to the Sultan was imperative for good government,⁸⁶ which also shows that despite all the divine attributes of the ruler and all the talk about the mysteries of the state, it was not fully clear whether or not there was a specific form of knowledge that could only be attained by the rulers.⁸⁷ The rulers and their inner circle were prob-

85 Âli – Tietze, 43.

86 “[The king] should never cease to employ God-fearing spies and chaste experts and [through them] every hour and every moment explore the public affairs and investigate the doings of the officials (*hukkam*). It is however necessary that the spies whom he employs be fluent like a reedpen in speaking the truth and free from malevolent intent and lying, that they do not cover up the dependents in order to please the viziers and do not take bribes from the rich and tell snakelike-winding sweet lies that clash with the facts. To this effect also the spies themselves should be investigated from time to time and those who are found to lie and whose candle in the circle of loyalty gives but a dim light should be ordered to be cut into two halves with the saw of execution and punished with unlimited severity, so as to be a warning example for the others, causing them always to fear the king’s anger and to guard themselves against the consuming fire of the Sultan’s wrath,” *ibid.*, 47. Âli reiterates the same view in *Mevâ ‘idü ‘n-nefâ ‘is fî kavâ ‘idi ‘l-mecâlis*, ed. Mehmet Şeker (Ankara, 1997), 280-1.

87 Compare this with Walzer’s remarks for early modern Europe and France: “It is important to stress that the allusion in the phrase ‘mysteries of state’ is not to any

ably cautious enough not to leave everything to the hands of divine authority as they knew that the political dimension of any social formation was much about practice as it was about discourse. In the case of England, for instance, “although angelic intelligence remained an ideal attribute of the sovereign, on the practical level political power was covertly joined with faulty human knowledge, an alliance that produced government by both council and (particularly in Jacobean England) manipulative statecraft ... Intelligence in the sense of the sovereign’s ideal knowledge became in practice intelligence as spying, a relation governed as much by opacity as by understanding.”⁸⁸ And as far as intelligence gathering is concerned, the sovereigns’ practical concern was to control their immediate surrounding rather than the public at large. These remarks do not amount to say that the sovereign or the ruling elites did not care about what the common people said or thought, just the contrary: they had all the reasons to keep certain forms of information as circumscribed as possible. Their rising anxiety in the face of the emergence of a powerful “public opinion” in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century attests to the importance they attributed to subversive political effect of the words they cannot control. And they were right worrying about the expansion of a critical public sphere because even though it was a gradual process, the process involved many factors that undermined their privileges: from the restructuring of the urban milieu to the emergence of new social classes, from the spread of the printed material to a gradual “desacralization” of the king.

In the scheme of the control of information, rumor can, therefore, be expected to pose a threat to the ruling elite, perhaps a bigger threat than the court intrigues. As Cengiz Kırılı suggests “like the other early modern societies, rumor constituted the single most important medium in the Ottoman Empire ... While its ambiguous and anonymous characteristics made it a powerful agent in the web of communication in the society, its mobilizing

particular body of knowledge that the king had mastered. There were many things, indeed, that a king needed to know, and so he called lawyers and generals to his side and hired tutors for his sons. But the art of and mystery of kingship itself no man could teach him. It was a divine gift, perhaps, like the gift of healing, or a natural capacity inherent to the royal person ... he lived, like the head, perched high above the body, with a sense of distance and power and a degree of understanding that were his alone”, Walzer (ed.), *Regicide and Revolution*, 24.

88 John Michael Archer, *Sovereignty and Intelligence: Spying and Court Culture in the English Renaissance* (Stanford, 1993), 3.

capacity as a vehicle of dissent made it an object for the state to control and suppress. In the eyes of the state its uncontrollable nature made it a formidable threat against social order.”⁸⁹ Especially after the regicide of Osman II, the ban on the coffeehouses in the first half of the seventeenth century must have had a lot to do with the perceptions that rumor and popular political discourse (“*devlet sohbeti*”)⁹⁰ were detrimental to the order of the society.⁹¹ Murat IV, famous for his crackdown on the coffeehouses and the taverns must surely have kept in mind how fatally dangerous any uncontrolled word could be for the powers-that-be. Nevertheless, a note of caution is appropriate in this regard: the lack of the archival sources prevents historians from establishing with confidence the extent to which the ban of the coffeehouses was related to growing fear from the “public opinion” per se,⁹² but if it is plausible to argue that the discovery and the control of the “public opinion” is more of a nineteenth century phenomenon than the seventeenth, it may be argued that to posit a dichotomy between state and civil society is too simplistic and that the bans of the seventeenth century had more to do with inter-elite struggle rather than distinct social classes or, state and civil society.

The deposition and the regicide of Osman II should also be evaluated in the same context: as an inter-elite struggle but also a struggle about the scope of the “government.” The *kul* may have been of the “*askeri*” - military - class and enjoying certain privileges belonging exclusively to the higher echelons of the social hierarchy, but there was a limit to what they could ask for from the sultan in terms of participation in the political realm. The involvement of the *kul* in the ideological sphere of “*siyâsa*” was not a foregone conclusion because the distinctiveness of the Sultan, at least, on the ideological level made the incorporation of the *kul* in the “inner circle” inadmissible. In this sense, even though the chroniclers justify the uprising of the *kul*, they are reluctant to go so far as to justify the regicide, there-

89 Kırılı, “The Struggle over Space,” 53.

90 Kırılı, *Sultan ve Kamuoyu*, 18-26.

91 For different examples of the state’s anxiety on the dissemination of rumor during and after the seventeenth century, see Boyar and Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, 40-46.

92 For the seventeenth century and the “practical” problems posed by the absence of the archival sources, see *ibid.*, especially Chapter 1.

fore, to eliminate the ground that makes “the political” possible.⁹³ Even when some form of resistance is condoned, the Sultan always remains the locus of the sovereignty and either the advisors are blamed for corrupting the just order of the society and ruining the welfare of the Islamic community, or the rebels go too far. As Al-Azmeh puts it, “the primary topic [in Muslim kingship] is royal distance that obedience and veneration are premised, and it is across the space of this distance that the relationship of activity and passivity operates, as between two entirely independent substances. Although full cognizance is made of the differentiation amongst the subjects, particularly between the king’s entourage (the *khassa*) and the *’amma*, the former are by no means exempt from consideration and rules affirming distance.”⁹⁴

Obviously, the ideological conventions of the rules of governance, especially those based on the “uniqueness” and the “omnipotence” of the Sultan, do not correspond to the actual social configuration of the power relations. However, given the presumptions of this ideological framework and institutional structure, I would argue that rumor seems to work as that invisible thread that eliminates the distance between the *kul* and the Sultan, and incorporates the *kul* within the realm of “*siyâsa*.” Literally and figuratively, rumor enters the very core of politics: it informs the *kul* of the intensions of the Sultan, and the crowd, mobilized by rumor, enters the Topkapı Palace and transgresses all the symbolic thresholds of distance that separate the Sultan from his subjects.

A latent motif permeates the “leveling effect” of rumor as it freely circulates between the palace and the barracks of the *kul*; the symbolic and ceremonial spaces that are supposed to be kept separate for the sake of good “government.” In order to articulate the significance of

93 It is important to differentiate the political from the politics. Chantal Mouffe argues that the political is the “dimension of antagonism which [is] constitutive of human societies, while ... politics [is] the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political;” Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London, New York, 2005), 9. Even though I have reservations about Mouffe’s overemphasis on the antagonist character of the political, it is important to see that the political is more essential for the constitution of the societies than the different forms (politics) it can take.

94 Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, 124.

this “leveling effect,” we can turn to Piterberg’s insights about the “territorial sites in the poetics and historical imagination of the Ottomans.” This particular perspective construes the relations between the Sultan and the *kul*, not only vertically and in terms of agency (from top to bottom, in a hierarchical order) but also horizontally and in terms of space: a dichotomy based on the analogies of “garden” and “wilderness” signifying Istanbul and the provinces, respectively, was at work in the poetic and historical imagination of the Ottomans. Accordingly, one of the reasons why the *kul* might have opposed Osman II’s intentions to leave Istanbul and go to Anatolia was precisely that this intention violated the “established boundaries between interiority and exteriority, garden and wilderness.”⁹⁵ In this scheme, the garden represents a more hierarchical society with a comparatively developed economy based on the division of labor, whereas the wilderness makes reference to a more nomadic social structure.

It is significant that Istanbul, the garden par excellence, was at the same time a multi-layered space. On the one hand, “*siyâsa*” was strictly confined to the Palace and identified with the prerogatives of the Sultan. On the other hand, the military quarters were the refuge of the *kul*. It is precisely by connecting these two different realms that rumor causes a “leveling effect” and creates a sense of uncertainty. As Piterberg and Tezcan point out, the military quarters and their mosque function as a safe haven for the janisaries, or as a sanctuary that gives further legitimacy to the rule of Sultan Mustafa.⁹⁶ That is, even though rumor brings news from the palace and informs the *kul* of the imminent threats that they may be subjected to, it also forces them to take refuge in their own sanctuary, an act which paradoxically reaffirms the multi-layered organization of space leaving another major lacuna for a coherent conceptual reevaluation of the act of transgression. Thus, a particular attention to the poetics of space can help elucidate the elusive nature of rumor and point out how it could be related to the historical imagination of the early modern Ottoman polity.

95 Piterberg, “The Varieties of Territorial Sites,” 21.

96 Ibid., 16; Tezcan, “The history of a ‘primary source,’” 53.

Concluding Remarks

Enfant de l'insécurité, la rumeur crée des liens puissants entre les membres d'une communauté dont l'angoisse ne supporte plus des questions sans réponse. Se pressent alors les interrogations de circonstance: "Pourquoi cette calamité s'abat-elle précisément sur nous, et maintenant? Il doit y avoir une cause à tant de malheurs, une raison diabolique." Ainsi la rumeur peut-elle se mettre à l'oeuvre pour soulager une peur panique. La chasse au bouc émissaire est ouverte et les présumés coupables, devenus victimes, expient dans leur chair le prix de la confusion publique.⁹⁷

I have argued that in the narratives of the seventeenth century historians who wrote on the regicide of Osman II rumor functions in two major ways. First, rumor prevents the reader from attributing any pre-meditation and intention to the *kul* in the act of regicide and relieves them from the burden of responsibility while at the same time portraying them as unanimously united. Second, it emerges as the medium through which the well-maintained ideological hierarchies of the political edifice are "leveled." And the transgression of the distance between the Sultan and the *kul* suggests in turn that they all operate on the same ground, namely the *siyâsa*. But is this convincing enough for the modern – and perhaps empirically minded – historian? Does the elusive nature of rumor also pervade the historian's craft and make his/her reconstruction of the past less tenable? In the introduction, I have tried to show why rumor matters in general for social sciences; it is in order, then, to conclude with more specific suggestions for Ottoman history.

Rumor, by its very nature, is one of those subjects that cuts across various fields of research and situates the historian at a level where the analysis of the different aspects of social formation is necessary. More specifically, a study of rumor that focuses on the interplay between history and historiography can make Ottoman history more conversant with other disciplines. Taking seriously the insights of the "linguistic and cultural turns" in humanities and critically reflecting on the ideological conventions that make up the foundations of political thinking are the initial steps for this endeavor. To give an example, we can enter another field already crossed by

⁹⁷ Maurice Olander, *La Rumeur*, 9.

Piterberg and ask whether or not rumor can be seen as a speech act.⁹⁸ But even more importantly, we can ask whether or not the emphasis on rumor lends support to Piterberg's argument that Tuđi's text is open to a double-reading: "first, in its own context as an oral address to the imperial troops in the capital, and then as a written artifact that was read and reworked by several Ottoman historians."⁹⁹ Following the "traces of orality" in the written texts, Piterberg and Tezcan provide convincing arguments that Tuđi's text was also meant to be read aloud to the *kul* in different circumstances when they gathered together,¹⁰⁰ and as such it also was "an actual speech act."¹⁰¹ Rumor as another dimension of the speech act in ordinary language and as a form of information and communication was, without a doubt, more "at home" in oral communication than in written word – at least, at the turn of the seventeenth century in Istanbul.¹⁰² This particular attention to rumor as speech act and cultural practice also draws our attention to the strategic use and appropriation of space and the locations where the word meets its audience – suggesting that we should go beyond the coffeehouses as the locus classicus of rumor.

James C. Scott takes these insights and examines rumor and gossip in relation to different forms of resistance. According to Scott, gossip can be a weapon of the weak, but in a particular way: because, while subversive, it is nevertheless respectful of the established normative order. To be effective, rumor and gossip, in most of the cases, remains within the accepted norms of conduct.¹⁰³ Scott's remarks are important because it

98 To which John Beard Haviland, with respect to gossip, answers in affirmative; see his *Gossip, Reputation, and Knowledge in Zinacantan* (Chicago and London, 1977).

99 Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*, 71.

100 Tezcan argues that Tuđi was a story teller and folk poet at the same time, and he might well have performed his account of the regicide in different circumstances; see Tezcan, "The history of a <primary source.>"

101 Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*, 73-6.

102 It is, of course, true that the print culture is crucial for the dissemination of the hearsay, especially with the internet in last decade.

103 "Malicious gossip is a respecter of the larger normative order within which it operates. Behind every piece of gossip that is not merely news is an implicit statement of a rule or norm that has been broken. It is in fact only the violation of expected behavior that makes an event worth gossiping about. The rule or norm in question is often only formulated or brought to consciousness by the violation

is essential for the modern historian to reflect on the position of the *kul* within the power configuration of the seventeenth century: were they the weak party resisting the impositions of a stronger group, or on the contrary, were they the guardians of a normative order that benefited them? Can the content and the function of rumor help elucidate their positions? To put it otherwise, can a particular attention on rumor help the historian to offer a more balanced account of social change rather than portraying the agents of change as either villains or heroes? By forcing the historian to come to grips with its ambivalent nature (both subversive and sanctioning the established normative order), can the study of rumor prevent the excesses of seeing the factions (in the case of Osman II) either as representing the state or the forces of civil society? Cemal Kafadar's remarks on the early seventeenth century and especially on the dynamics of the Kadızadeli movement point to the need for a much more nuanced and varied reading of the new urban realities. Rumor might have been seen as seditious talk by the state authorities, but the state was not the only force to be alarmed by the proliferation of new social spaces that gave way to new forms of communication and socialization. "A pivotal question," says Kafadar, "in the struggle over the soul and character of the new urban setting was who would determine and enforce its norms."¹⁰⁴ Admittedly, there is much more to be done to begin to answer such questions but the answer does not need to be framed within rigid progressive-reactionary or state-civil society dichotomies.

More importantly, can a proper study of rumor keep anachronistic interpretations in check? How does the historian come to grips with the interplay between contingency and long term processes of social change as they are revealed by rumor? What is the proper timeframe that best captures rumor? Is rumor a component of *histoire événementielle* or is it to be situated within a longer term? In this respect, I would like to suggest that

itself. Deviance, in this sense, defines what is normal ... gossip is never "disinterested"; it is a partisan effort (by class, faction, family) to advance its claims and interests against those of others. But this manipulation of the rules can only be successful to the extent that an appeal is made to standards of conduct that are generally accepted. Gossip thus accommodated its malicious work as an admittedly weak social sanction by remaining more or less *within* the established normative framework. In this respect the use of gossip by the poor also manifests a kind of prudence and respect, however, manipulative, of its own;" Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 282.

104 Kafadar, "Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul," 121.

rumor forces the historian to take into account both the particular features of a single event and the structural dimensions of longer term processes. In the specific case of the regicide, the tension between contingency and structure is even more important because it comes down to assigning causality to the unfolding of the events. Precisely because “rumor becomes a stand-in when truth is at a crossroads,”¹⁰⁵ that it is the ultimate ground for juxtaposing different historical times and narratives.¹⁰⁶

Finally, it must be noted that a comparative study of rumor in the early modern polities may be rewarding – not only for a better understanding of the period but also to write a more critical history of the present. While the content of rumor may tell us about the uses of popular discourse, tales, perceptions, and assumptions about politics, its form, that is, its “spatial” movement can be useful to explain the interaction among various classes in different contexts. Furthermore, an analysis of the “control of information” in early modern polities may also provide another ground for comparing the strategies used by the central authorities. Throughout this study, I have tried to show that as far as the control of information and communication is concerned, the basic assumptions and responses of the early modern states were strikingly similar. As Arlette Farge puts, “both existent and non-existent, popular speaking about current events dwelt in a kind a limbo: in politics it had no place, but its suspect nature was nothing if not a commonplace.”¹⁰⁷ In this regard, one of the major dynamics of the transition from early modern to modern times is the changing relationship between “popular speaking” and politics. The historical process through which public sphere expanded and posited the popular speaking in the center of politics also lays bare some of the fundamental dilemmas of our modern predicament, namely, the dilemma between the emancipatory potential of the public realm and its apolitical privatization or totalitarian tendencies. If rumor could be used as a weapon of the excluded crowd

105 Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses*, 11.

106 Let us note here that Piterberg’s remarks on Tuđi’s work as a “special event” history rather than another example of *Tarih-i Âl-i Osman* tradition, which is spatially and temporally much more comprehensive, is another reason to reflect on how rumor may be related to this specific genre; Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*, 71-2.

107 Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth-century France*, tr. Rosemary Morris (Cambridge, 1994), 4.

in the early modern context, in modern times it could be a force that can – and does – collapse the distinction between public and private and puts into peril the emancipatory potential of political participation in the public sphere. For this reason, a proper study of rumor goes beyond the boundaries of historical research and necessitates a critical reflection on the normative values of the historian on his/her present day predicament.¹⁰⁸

In the writings of the early modern historians, the people or what we call today public opinion appears only as an appendix to the deeds of the powerful. They were present insofar as they affirmed the rule of the rulers; as spectators to their ceremonies, as participants to their sorrows, or when their number was big enough to be a political concern for the authorities and when there was a rumor of popular discontent.¹⁰⁹ Rumor, then, puts the people or at least a part of the people on the scene, and makes them “audible.” It is this highly ambivalent and changing relationship between the public and the authorities that the historian of the early modern period should give an attentive ear to.¹¹⁰ Admittedly, the role of rumor in the case of Osman II is not about the “people;” what we hear is much more limited and confined to the inter-elite struggle for hegemony, but this is not a reason for not broadening the scope of research. In this vein, another promising venue would be to do a more comprehensive study

108 Discussing rumor and gossip from the perspective of political theory, and especially with reference to the public realm, politics, emancipation, or the relationship between speaking and listening as the foundational acts of the liberal and the republican political theories is beyond the limits of this essay. However, suffice it to say that such an approach can be highly productive for making history more conversant with political theory. Among others, I believe that Hannah Arendt, with her emphasis on the essential importance of public realm and politics for our human condition, could be the best starting point; for a general discussion, see Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, second ed. (Lanham, 2003) [and more specifically on gossip, see 11, and 127-31]. Of course, the works of Jurgen Habermas and Richard Sennett are also among the classics because of their historical accounts.

109 Farge’s remarks will sound familiar to the students of Ottoman history: “The people appear in three different kinds of situation: to express their joy or sorrow at royal ceremonies (marriages or funerals, Te Deums for a victory or birth of a prince); when the criminal element among the people of Paris plunges the whole place into cut-throat insecurity; and when there are ugly rumors of popular discontent in the city,” Farge, *Subversive Words*, 15.

110 *Ibid.*, 4.

on the role of rumor in each major uprising at the turn of each century. A comparative study of the regicide of Osman II (1622), and Patrona Halil (1730) and Kabakçı Mustafa (1807) rebellions may provide insights for understanding the changing dynamics between the central authorities and the military class, the perceptions of the observers, and the new social groups that come to play important roles in the new power configurations. More importantly, rumor, drawing attention to the relationship between the forms of knowledge pertinent to the state and society can help shed more light on the transformation of the state from a set of institutions identified with a ruler to one referring to a distinct sphere of authority with an established bureaucracy. To give an account of the difference between “*esrâr-ı devlet*” and “*le secret du roi*” of the early modern times and the classified information of the “*raison d’état*” of the present is an endeavor worth engaging in.

Rumor is to be taken seriously for more immediate reasons, too. Osman II, upon hearing the news of the crowd gathering and agitating is reported to have said: “they are without a head, they will disperse quickly” (“*başsızdırlar tiz dağılırlar*”). His dismissal of the power of the crowd proved to be a huge mistake. Was he looking for names, or for those he could identify as leaders? In other words, was he looking for a rationale, a “head” without which the rest, the crowd, could not function? Maybe it was this search of a “head” that proved to be his biggest mistake; for, the figure of rumor, when it enters the scene in Shakespeare’s play Henry IV, wears a custom painted full of tongues, representing “that blunt monster with uncounted heads.”¹¹¹

111 Neubauer, *The Rumour*, 75.