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A MOBILE BOUNDARY: EMPIRES, NOMADS, AND REFUGEES BETWEEN TRIPOLITANIA AND TUNISIA¹

Abstract

This article introduces the concept of a “mobile boundary” in the context of North Africa from 1881 to 1893, when various non-state actors resisted French and Ottoman attempts to delineate an official border between Tripolitania and Tunisia. By focusing on the activities of nomadic, tribal, and refugee populations, this study explores how these groups created a mobile boundary, one defined by their fluid mobility and identities and challenges to imperial conceptions of fixed borders. It challenges prevailing narratives on the making of the Tripolitania-Tunisia border that emphasize the cartographic diplomacy between France and the Ottoman Empire following the establishment of the French protectorate over Tunisia in 1881. This manuscript highlights the mobility of various non-state actors in destabilizing imperial cartographic conceptions of the Tripolitania-Tunisia border and the imperial attempt to manage mobility and settlement to advance state interests. It argues that these mobile populations continually reshaped imperial conceptions of the Tripolitania-Tunisian border and contributed to new challenges the French and Ottoman empires had to address. It also contends that tensions over the border evolved into attempts to exploit the mobility of “nomads-cum-refugees” as a destabilizing force to secure imperial interests.

خلاصة

تُقدّم هذه المقالة مفهوم “الحدود المتنقلة” في سياق المغرب (أفريقيا الشمالية) من عام ١٨٨١ إلى عام ١٨٩٣، عندما قاومت جهات غير حكومية مختلفة المحاولات الفرنسية والعثمانية لترسيم حدود رسمية بين طرابلس وتونس. بالتركيز على أنشطة السكان الرحل والقبليين واللاجئين، تستكشف هذه الدراسة كيف أنشأت هذه الجماعات حدوداً متنقلة، تحددها حركتها وهوياتها المتغيرة وتحدياتها للمفاهيم الإمبريالية للحدود الثابتة. كما تُعارض هذه الدراسة الروايات السائدة حول رسم حدود طرابلس وتونس، والتي تُركّز على الدبلوماسية الخرائطية بين فرنسا والإمبراطورية العثمانية عقب فرض الحماية الفرنسية على تونس عام ١٨٨١. تسلط هذه المخطوطة الضوء على تنقلات مختلف الجهات غير الحكومية في زعزعة استقرار المفاهيم الخرائطية الإمبريالية لحدود طرابلس وتونس، والمحاولة الإمبريالية لإدارة التنقلات والاستيطان لتعزيز مصالح الدولة. تجادل هذه المقالة بأن هذه التجمعات السكانية المتنقلة أعادت صياغة المفاهيم الاستعمارية للحدود بين طرابلس وتونس باستمرار، وساهمت في خلق تحديات جديدة كان على الإمبراطوريتين الفرنسية والعثمانية مواجهتها. كما تزعم أن التوترات على الحدود تطورت إلى محاولات لاستغلال تنقل “البدو الرحل اللاجئيين” كقوة مزعومة للاستقرار لضمان المصالح الاستعمارية.



INTRODUCTION

In March 1882, shaykhs, notables, and other kin of the Ilham tribe gathered to pen a petition in Arabic to the Ottoman sultan Abdülhamid II. Only ten months earlier, the Ilham tribe had sought refuge within Ottoman Tripolitania after experiencing forced exile following the French invasion of Tunisia in May 1881 and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Bardo, which marked the beginning of the French protectorate over Tunisia. The petitioners' requests informed the sultan that they had abandoned hundreds of fertile farms, their fruit-bearing trees, their two Sufi lodges (*iki zaviye*), and, most importantly, their homeland (*terk-i vatan*). During the invasion, the notables of the Ilham tribe explained, French soldiers had the advantage of using modern long-range shooting rifles and that their own rifles were antiquated. As a result, their kin—such as Shaykh Hamza of the Ilham tribe—were martyred along with many other companions. In their new refuge in Tripolitania over the last few months, the petitioners complained that they could no longer survive in their poor state and requested permission to return to their lands in Tunisia. They declared that the reputation of the Ilham—the tribe's courage and strength (*kudret*)—was well known throughout Tunisia, and that its members could mobilize their kin to unite and repel the French.² As the Ilham petitioners demonstrated, the interimperial war for territories in North Africa occurred not just between imperial metropolises but also on makeshift borders, where it was carried out through the employment and mobilization of nomadic refugee tribes.

Current historiography on the making of the Tripolitania-Tunisia border focuses on official imperial diplomacy between France and the Ottoman Empire following the establishment of the French protectorate over Tunisia in 1881. These studies have concentrated on the making of a "neutral border zone," formal diplomatic negotiations between imperial representatives, and legal cartographic disputes between Ottoman and French delegations to delineate a border between these two territories—though both sides failed to agree on where to demarcate the border in 1893.³ Only with the Franco-Turkish convention signed in Tripoli on 19 May 1910 did both empires finally delimit the present-day 285-mile-long Tunisia-Libya border and end the three-decade-long quarrel over the contested towns in the north at Ajdir and in the south at Nalut and Ghadames.⁴ While scholarship has

framed the late nineteenth-century Ottoman-French diplomatic negotiations as a failure, sparse consideration has been given to the non-state actors who also participated in this process. Under such an understanding, non-state actors played a marginal role in the stabilization and destabilization of this North African territory.

This article introduces an alternative perspective to the conflict over the Tripolitania-Tunisia border focused on the power of mobility and settlement. It does so by conceptualizing this region interconnecting Tripolitania and Tunisia as a “mobile boundary.” As Samuel Dolbee has argued in the context of the Jazira, Ottoman authorities and nomadic groups engaged one another in an “ambiguous place” such as a desert, where “the language of mobility and ethnicity blurred” and where moving groups manipulated borders and the environment to create a “locus of disorder.”⁵ In a similar vein, Isa Blumi has stated that the margins of the Ottoman Empire – Albania and southern Yemen – were not frontiers nor are usefully understood as borderlands, but in the post-Tanzimat period (1876–1909), they were the forefront of the struggle of the late nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire to manage its “human and natural resources.” In turn, these two lands, much like the territories of Tripolitania and Tunisia, were “inhabited by populations who comfortably fused multiple associations that blur[red] any lines of distinction used by historians or theorists of identity.”⁶

The article’s framework underscores this region’s mobile boundary wherein Ottoman imperial authorities, much like French authorities, needed to account for local agents and their “fluidity of action” to understand these changing conceptions of territory and responses to the imposition of a border. In the lands connecting Tripolitania to Tunisia, mobile groups of nomadic and tribal federations in the Regency of Tunis blurred power in the margins and transcended Ottoman and French attempts to create territorial limits framed by imperial functionaries. While acknowledging the decision-making apparatus of imperial powers, my analysis of a mobile boundary accounts for the actions of non-state actors—various nomadic, tribal, and refugee populations—whose frequent autonomous movements across and within Tripolitania and Tunisia undermined imperial conceptions of fixed borders and forced empires to take their resistance into consideration. In this manner, this article argues that from 1881 to 1893 the mobile boundary between Tripolitania and Tunisia was defined less by state authority and more by non-state actors who worked with and against imperial efforts to create a fixed border. It further reveals the way in which empires and

non-state actors were in a constant state of friction over what borders meant in the context of the interimperial race of the late nineteenth century. It exemplifies the idea that imperial stratagems could be efficiently or inefficiently planned and yet face challenges from below.

Engaging scholarship that has treated migrants and refugees as significant non-state actors presents mobility and settlement as a window to underscore the multifaceted processes of state making in the late nineteenth century. In his examination of the border region between France and Spain, Peter Sahlins demonstrated that the making of border regions included the participation of a wide variety of historical actors who reconfigured cartographic conceptions and the markings of borders.⁷ Likewise, the fact that many migrants and refugees self-identified and were recognized by the Ottoman government as *muhacir* gave them a privileged status that demarcated their loyalty to the Ottoman sultan.⁸ The most important attributes of the *muhacir* were their productivity and acceptance of Ottoman subjecthood in exchange for land, privilege, and invaluable exemptions from taxes and conscription. When considering the populations from the North Caucasus, this imperial categorization of *muhacir* extended throughout settlements in Anatolia and the Mashriq, constructing what one historian has called “an empire of refugees.”⁹

What remains distinctive in this article’s case study is the systematic effort of the Ottoman state to transform Tunisian nomadic and tribal populations considered by authorities to be “nomads” (*Tunus urbani*) into “refugee-settlers” (*Tunus muhacirleri*).¹⁰ In this vein, the term *muhacir*—the imperial government’s loyal refugee, settler, colonist, sentry, and agriculturist—was a transformative nineteenth-century Ottoman classification. It has been often associated with populations settled in Anatolia and Greater Syria from the Balkans and the Caucasus but settlement of *muhacir* populations in North Africa is yet to be explored at length.¹¹ What is notable in the North African context is the categorical attempt by Ottoman officials stationed in Tripolitania to classify these nomadic and tribal populations as loyal *muhacirler* and obscure the continuous tensions between state and non-state actors concerning local identities and loyalties.

Far from the ideal and loyal subjects the Ottoman state sought to incorporate in the empire, these mobile groups of Tunisians are better conceptualized as “nomads-cum-refugees” who had their own local conceptions of loyalty and authority and proceeded to either support the imperial government or undermine its designs to settle them.¹² While those who settled and declared their loyalty had accepted the Ottoman state’s terms of being a *muhacir*, Ottoman

officials categorized those on the move as “nomads” (*urban*) along with specifying particular acts that emphasized them as “uncivilized” because of undertakings that included conducting “raids” and “pillaging” that discursively fueled Ottoman conceptions of banditry and nomadism (*bedeviyet*).¹³ This article contends that the various nomadic, tribal, and refugee populations in Tunisia and Tripolitania are better understood to occupy an interstitial legal category, a fluid typology between “nomad” and “refugee” who traversed the lands between Tripolitania and Tunisia wherein, at times, they abided by Ottoman settlement policies and, at other times, objected to the imperial expectations that came with these legal political classifications. In this manner, these various populations founded a mobile boundary that undermined border making and did not fit the rigid framework that other scholars have argued to fulfill the terms of the *muhacir*. Instead, their agency permitted them to reside in and move about autonomously in a space that constituted the make-shift boundaries between French-occupied Tunisia and Ottoman Tripolitania. This introduces a new perspective to understanding not only the movements and actions of these populations but also the shifting meanings of *urban* and *muhacir* in this North African context. The various nomadic, tribal, and refugee populations in Tunisia and Tripolitania blurred Ottoman imperial expectations vis-à-vis the notion of the ideal *muhacir*, which in turn made it difficult for Ottoman authorities to draw a clear line between who was a loyal ally and who was an opponent. Thus, these populations, as nomads-cum-refugees, possessed a liminal existence, expressed fluid identities, and had the choice to maintain loyalty to their own tribes and federation, and selectively determine their allegiances to the Ottomans or the French.

The Ottoman Empire’s goals of settling and integrating nomads were driven by a dual focus: territorial expansion and ensuring security of that territory. Yet, the shifting interests and agency of non-state actors constantly reshaped those priorities through negotiations over settlement. In the context of Algeria, while the French were deeply entrenched in carrying out military expansionism and settler colonialism, their imperial plans to continue such settlement policies in Tunisia, and perhaps Tripolitania, depended on the success of controlling tribal populations and maintaining security in southern Tunisia.¹⁴ Meanwhile, late nineteenth-century Ottoman authorities in North Africa needed to prioritize settlement to provide security against nomadic populations, support the Sublime Porte’s goals of expanding into the Chad Basin, and to create settler colonies to transform Cyrenaica into what Ottoman military commanders called the “Second Egypt” — a commercial and agricultural center aimed to rival other

imperial powers in the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁵ Likewise, the combination of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, the Provincial Reform Law of 1864, and the reconfiguration of administrative, social, and urban spaces had bolstered the presence of the central administration and limited the autonomy and mobility of nomadic tribes.¹⁶ In light of these developments, Ottoman authorities in other territories possessed an evolving relationship with various nomadic and tribal populations who strived to maintain autonomous interests, yet piggybacked on the benefits that could be obtained through imperial reform and intrigue.¹⁷

Given that migration, settlement, and empire making were interrelated in the late nineteenth-century geopolitical realm of boundary making, this article examines the making of a mobile boundary between Tripolitania and Tunisia in three parts. First, it situates this development within a broader Ottoman and geopolitical context to account for the importance of mobility and settlement within late nineteenth-century North Africa. Second, it discusses how the mobility of various nomadic, tribal, and refugee populations constituted an interimperial issue that destabilized imperial conceptions of the Tripolitania-Tunisia border. Third, it elucidates how Ottoman imperial authorities attempted to control mobility through settlement in order to advance imperial interests in delineating a makeshift border. In short, mobility presented a dilemma: it was a substantial benefit to those on the move and those empires who gained from the movement, but, at the same time, a detriment to empires that sought to maintain stability and security in a territory wherein migration and those who migrated presented a challenge that rivaled imperial interests.

A (UN)CIVILIZED SPACE OF NOMADISM IN OTTOMAN LIBYA

Upon reestablishing direct administrative control over Tripolitania in 1835, the Ottoman government had attempted to implement various stratagems to manage what it identified as various nomadic communities of what is today's western and eastern Libya. For one, the Ottomans inherited the administrative structures founded during the century-long rule of the Karamanli Dynasty in Tripoli and faced new challenges in 1835 when authorities attempted to safeguard imperial interests against regional power brokers. Local indigenous resistance led by the Mahammad notable, Ghuma al-Mahmudi, prevented the Ottomans from swiftly conquering the coastal plain of the Jafara and the Jabal Nafusa until Ghuma was killed in 1856.¹⁸ The next phases of state building in Tripolitania came in the 1860s, with administrative reforms that introduced an Ottoman imperial framework to control the

local semi-nomadic and settled population: an Ottoman criminal and civil judicial system, taxation, conscription, a postal system, telegraph line, and the creation of administrative districts.¹⁹ Despite these new infrastructural developments, tribal confederations and their notables were non-state actors who safeguarded local interests by continuing to direct regional political economies in the interior where Ottoman control had reached its limit.²⁰

With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Ottoman-Russo War of 1877–1878, the Congress of Berlin and subsequent “Scramble for Africa” set forth the ground rules for the European acquisition of colonies and exploitation of land, labor, and resources. Among these rules was the sovereign claim to so-called empty land—an assertion that sanctioned the implementation of a variety of violent and coercive measures to expropriate territory from indigenous populations.²¹ These imperial measures included forced displacement of indigenous inhabitants, assimilation policies, a civilizing mission to eliminate the “savage” nature of those inhabitants, and their replacement with “ideal settlers.”²² As European imperial powers began their race for these “empty” territories, the Ottomans entered this competitive interimperial rivalry by signing the Treaty of Berlin and thus making the empire a participant in the acquisition of African colonies.²³ Ottoman authorities had already begun to employ refugees and migrants from the Crimea and the Caucasus in the eastern Mediterranean for a variety of means. One such goal was to transform the ecology of the Anatolian frontier of Cilicia for agricultural production and cash crop profits.²⁴ Likewise, Ottoman functionaries conceived of the vast territory from western Tripolitania to Egypt as empty land (*arazi-i haliye*), even though nomadic tribes used the land seasonally.²⁵ The indigenous nomadic presence within North Africa, however, had challenged Ottoman goals of readily transforming these lands into a fruit-bearing, and, more importantly, a profit-bearing space.²⁶

In the mid-nineteenth century, an Ottoman discourse reshaped how civil servants and other imperial functionaries viewed nomadic populations’ productivity and recategorized them according to class, ethnicity, and religion. The discourse itself was a colonial one that distinguished the other in Ottoman society and differentiated those “who live in a state of nomadism and savagery” from settled, tax-paying populations.²⁷ Moreover, it provided a discursive framework to subordinate populations living in so-called “backward peripheries.”²⁸ In fact, the mobility of nomadic pastoralists and their communities frustrated Ottoman officials who commented that “the nomads never

stop moving and keep following the path that leads them to where it rains (*nuzul-i matar*)."²⁹ Such phrases connoted that "nomads" rejected imperial stratagems of settlement and maintained their own autonomous movements and interests, which complicated measures meant to "civilize" them. Such movements demonstrated that these populations on the move had no immediate interest in conforming to imperial conceptions and policies of land ownership and usage. This led to tensions between Ottoman and local notions of proper land use and the question of who exactly would benefit from its cultivation. Furthermore, these tensions also presented another layer of obstacles to strengthen defensive positions in Tripolitania, the target of which both the French and Italians coveted during the Scramble for Africa.³⁰

Population movements throughout North Africa made mobility a significant factor in undermining imperial political authority and complicated matters when determining specific borders and boundaries. Possessing local knowledge of seasonal rains and fertile agricultural lands, nomadic and tribal populations demonstrated their navigational mastery through mobile agriculture, animal husbandry, and raiding along the coastlines and interior. This knowledge in combination with ties of kinship offered these populations their own sense of autonomy. Far from a one-size-fits-all category, nomadic and tribal populations were complex political amalgamations that were the byproduct of the creation and spread of Islam in North Africa. They were at once enmeshed in Islamic state craft and empire building and established decentralized zones of sovereignty, which challenged the authority of the Ottoman Empire. These North African Muslims also shared similar social and political formations that permitted for a supra-tribal and integrative zone manifested within the region's many Sufi lodges (*zawāyā*).³¹ As local powerbrokers, they and their representatives' consultation with Ottoman officials configured and reconfigured official state understandings of a boundary. Such consultations between state and non-state actors who resided between Cyrenaica and Egypt helped facilitate territorial delineation of an eastern Libyan border for Ottoman, Egyptian, and Italian officials.³² Similarly, in the French context, the disputes between local nomadic communities and French civilian and military administrators shaped designs of making and re-making the border between Algeria and Tunisia.³³

Taking into account the late Ottoman context and its distinctions between nomads (*urban*) and refugee-settlers (*muhacir*) as categories for mobile populations in North Africa situates the late nineteenth-century efforts to establish a Tripolitania-Tunisia border

within a broader framework of mobility, settlement, and state-building. As nomads-cum-refugees, their roles, as will be shown, contributed to either the stabilization or destabilization of imperial processes at the local level. While the French and the Ottomans disputed cartographic boundaries, it was this mobile opposition or support that defined the contours over which such conversations were had.

“NOMANDS-CUM-REFUGEES”: THE NORTH AFRICAN MIGRATION CRISIS OF THE 1880S

In April 1881, France invaded Tunisia on the pretext that members of the Khmir tribe in northwest Tunisia threatened France’s interests in neighboring Algeria. What began as a French military force of 36,000 soldiers to pursue recalcitrant nomadic tribes across the Algeria-Tunisia border ended with France’s military occupation of Tunisia, the signing of the Treaty of Bardo in May 1881, and the establishment of a French protectorate over Tunisia. This military maneuver completed France’s plans to take Tunisia – plans that had been brewing since the Congress of Berlin in 1878 – and marked France’s participation in the Scramble for Africa.³⁴

The subsequent bombardment of coastline ports and military actions against uprisings in northern Tunisia led to the mass movements of tens of thousands of tribes and displaced local inhabitants southward towards Tripolitania. Although the French considered these mobile populations “Tunisian insurgents” and “military or religious agitators,” local Ottoman authorities in Tripolitania accepted and categorized these displaced populations of local tribes and communities as refugees (*muhacirler*), the goal of which was to transform them into productive settlers and loyal Ottoman subjects. Far from being a homogenous population, these Tunisian refugees (*Tunus muhacirleri*) consisted of members from various federations of tribes and communities that operated along the coastlines and interior of Tunisia. According to Ottoman estimates, the number of refugees who sought refuge in neighboring Tripolitania in 1881 amounted to 250,000 individuals.³⁵ These men, women, and children were in fact members of the Matmata, Warghama, Hamama, Jalass, and Naffat tribes among others whose participation in the uprisings against the French or forced displacement had now pushed them to seek refuge under Ottoman protection.³⁶

The movement of tens of thousands of refugees had a significant impact on both Ottoman and French regional security and efforts to consolidate territory. French authorities prioritized pursuing

these mobile populations to halt their resistance efforts and control their movements in other areas of Tunisia in the interest of security.³⁷ Moreover, French authorities needed to address any insurrectionist actions immediately because they prevented France's goals of settling its own colonists in southern Tunisia.³⁸ Some of the French colonists consisted of former French officers such as Mr. Duplessis, who had been awarded a concession by the Consul General of France in Tunisia to dig up esparto grass in the mountainous region of southeastern Tunisia. What Mr. Duplessis quickly learned was that he could neither exploit the mountains nor begin his colonizing operations. Local resistance drove him out and caused him to renounce his right to these territories.³⁹ These local acts of resistance prompted the steady mobilization of French military forces and their relentless movement southward.⁴⁰ In turn, they not only established an armed sphere of French influence but also drove these same nomadic, tribal, and refugee populations into Ottoman territories.⁴¹

For Ottoman authorities, the primary concern was maintaining security within the province of Tripolitania. In the 1880s and continuing into the early twentieth century, Ottoman authorities had begun to implement plans to establish the "Second Egypt" in Cyrenaica, east of Tripolitania, that culminated with the settlement of large numbers of Cretan Muslim settlers to expand agriculturally and militarily.⁴² This decision supplanted any proposals to employ indigenous populations as it was primarily informed by the discourse of the productive and loyal *muḥacir*—the antithesis of how Ottoman authorities described nomads (*urban*) and even some local inhabitants (*ahali*) of Cyrenaica. These plans included not only settling but also arming refugee-settlers (*muḥacir*) to operate as auxiliaries and encouraging them to reinforce imperial troops in defense against recalcitrant members of the Sanusi order. In western Tripolitania, Ottoman interests included blocking French military encroachment into Ottoman lands and preventing intertribal violence amongst those who sought Ottoman protection.⁴³

This new challenge of maintaining the integrity of Tripolitania and managing a large population of Tunisian refugees exposed Ottoman officials and military officers to a variety of military vulnerabilities. First, Ottoman officials had to account for their lack of defense on the front facing Tunisia over land and the frequent arrival of French military reinforcements that bolstered French claims to have sovereignty in the western regions of Tripolitania surrounding Zuwara among other cities.⁴⁴ Second, the Ottomans lacked an adequate naval presence in the region to successfully repel French warships that

threatened and even attacked Ottoman military fortifications in the port of Tobruk in eastern Cyrenaica.⁴⁵ Now with the added administrative and fiscal burden of managing large populations of Tunisian refugees, the French invasion of Tunisia forced Ottoman officials to execute new administrative and military-oriented reform policies in Tripolitania in an attempt to safeguard the empire's remaining interests in North Africa.

The great number of nomadic tribes seeking refuge in Ottoman lands introduced new tensions over access to land and its resources. The French invasion of Tunisia had exacerbated tribal rivalries that carried over into Ottoman territories. First was the friction between two notable tribes—the Warghamma of Tunisia and the Nuwa'il of Tripolitania—that now competed over the monopolization of limited space and resources.⁴⁶ In their homelands in Tunisia the Warghamma (Figure 1), a confederation of four tribes, cultivated and stored grain, corn, and other vital cash crops in arable lands, Saharan pastures, and numerous villages, but now they sought other markets to control and exploit.⁴⁷ Before the French invasion, the confederation had enjoyed autonomy, demanded tributes from local tribes, and carried out caravan guard duties and tax collection of other tribes on behalf of the Tunisian beys.⁴⁸ More specifically, the Warghamma had previously controlled approximately 3,000 square kilometers in southern Tunisia by means of their armed horsemen and were seeking to establish their local operations outside of their homelands in Tripolitania.⁴⁹ The French hoped to capitalize on the displacement of the Warghamma by propagating a message of friendship to smaller neighboring tribes informing them that they did not have to endure any longer the “harsh tutelage of the Warghamma” and had been freed of their “oppressors.”⁵⁰ Local shaykhs and even Ottoman authorities of the Ministry of Finance grew concerned that the presence of the Warghamma tribe within the province of Tripolitania left local semi-nomadic inhabitants and tribes of Tripolitania vulnerable to their growing sphere of influence and possibility of conducting violent raids.

large federation of tribes in the region, Ottoman authorities could not carry out the practical matter of distinguishing who they called “bandits” (*eşkıya*) amongst the tens of thousands of Warghamma-affiliated refugees – a lack of local level intelligence that prevented any kind of specific policing. Their frequent movements and raids stifled Ottoman goals to exert control over the expansive territory extending from Tripolitania to Tunisia. Moreover, their fluid movement demonstrated that their pre-existing local knowledge of the land and its inhabitants had enabled them to use mobility to their advantage countering any imperial modes of preventative violence. By seeking refuge in Tripolitania, the Warghamma enjoyed and expressed a newfound local power by controlling the production and flow of goods, livestock, and people through their greater numbers and effective ability on horseback.

MOBILIZED TRIBES, TRANSREGIONAL MOVEMENTS

In the immediate years after the French invasion, Ottoman authorities in Tripolitania attempted to consolidate relationships with certain tribes, some affiliated with the Warghamma, to cultivate stronger ties between these mobile communities and the local imperial government. One tactic was to reward the leaders of tribes and the local settled population (*ahali*) who supported them with ceremonial medals and sustenance – both of which constituted a means to cement their ties to the Ottoman sultan and local authorities.⁵⁵ The promotion of certain shaykhs to high-ranking positions in Ottoman local governance comprised a strategy to win over certain tribal elites and encourage them to conduct war on other ungovernable tribes.⁵⁶ In this vein, these imperial-local relationships catalyzed the mobilization of loyal tribes against the French as the French military continued to amass its troops, equipment, and artillery in the southeast of Tunisia – actions that were seen as transgressions on Ottoman territory.⁵⁷ Likewise, Ottoman-led efforts to win over local Tunisian nomadic tribes such as medal-giving remained a means to prevent these tribes, now resettled in lands between Tripolitania and Tunisia, to act against Ottoman interests.⁵⁸

The imperial anxiety with cultivating stronger relationships with tribal leaders was not unfounded, as resettled tribes had kept their weapons. Incentivizing loyal chiefs to lay down their arms in exchange for medals was meant to shift the relationship between state and would-be-subject. Instead, the acts that followed this exchange ran contrary to imperial authorities’ assumptions that the granting of medals to these local elites signaled a sign of commitment or display of allegiance between the two parties. Tribal shaykhs had in fact sold their

Ottoman medals to obtain up-to-date firearms and ammunition to help reequip themselves and purchase horses for compatriots who participated in raids against local villages.⁵⁹ Other shaykhs who possessed medals also became targets for raids as the medals they carried were locally circulating currency used to purchase goods and arms.⁶⁰

Large numbers of armed, mounted nomads-cum-refugees from a mixed conglomerate of tribes in their constant raids against settled populations had instead created a mobile boundary, a blurred zone of movement and identity, from Zuwara on the northern coastline to Ghadames located near the modern southern crossroads of Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. Moreover, in times when they experienced pursuit by Ottoman authorities, they used their mastery of horsemanship to enter Tunisia not only to evade the Ottoman military but also to outmaneuver French authorities who could not keep up with them.⁶¹ This frustrated imperial authorities and brought about further French and Ottoman military mobilizations to address border disputes.⁶² In turn, armed nomads-cum-refugees demonstrated their power by continuing to raid villages along the lands between Tripolitania and Tunisia.

For Ottoman officials, the blame fell on the tribes of the Warghamma federation who openly used Tripolitania as the base of operations that extended into the interior of Tunisia. Numerous Warghamma members had participated in armed raids and had continued to benefit from their status of being refugees—the result of which violated the ideal embodiment of the Muslim *muhacir* among Ottoman authorities. The complexity of dealing with such a large federation of tribes such as the Warghamma led Ottoman authorities to settle some Warghamma members far west of Tripolitania in Biban so as to prevent further clashes between neighboring villages and to stop any immediate French transgressions from the north.⁶³ This strategy meant curbing destructive Warghamma operations in the east of Tripolitania and putting them in a position of employing their raids in the west to interrupt French interests.

Yet, there were some other Warghamma tribal members whom Ottoman authorities had deemed loyal. These Warghamma members had upheld state-initiated goals of settling in designated lands and conducting agriculture. More importantly, they maintained the ideal notion of being a *muhacir*—the meaning of which coincided with them also possessing “patriotism” (*muhabbet-i vatan*).⁶⁴ What this demarcation did was split the Warghamma federation into two or more competing factions over Ottoman patronage. Additionally, Ottoman

authorities in Tripolitania had reinforced other tribes such as the Mahamid tribe in Zuwara with firearms and issued tax exemptions to alleviate any tax burden resulting from Warghamma raids.⁶⁵ Yet, the attempted tactic of splitting the Warghamma federation had only fomented new bonds between the Warghamma and other tribes—the mobilization of which exacerbated local insecurity and any attempts to maintain a sense of sovereignty in the region.⁶⁶ For imperial powers, the resilience and agency of these non-state actors complicated efforts of authorities to delineate boundaries and make sense of these blurred identities and shifting loyalties. In such a way, these mobile groups not only asserted and redefined their autonomy over this contested space but also their fluid movements and identities contributed to the creation of a mobile boundary that effectively undermined imperial attempts to regulate the region and its communities.

AMNESTY AND MOBILIZATION

In 1884, the French government extended amnesty to the Tunisian tribes and refugees who had fled to Tripolitania three years earlier. One of the reasons for the amnesty was to reduce the amount of danger to French interests and expel the large population of Tunisians as far away as possible from Tripolitania.⁶⁷ The danger to French interests in Tunisia was exacerbated less than a year later with the British defeat at Khartoum to the Sudanese Mahdi's followers. Circulating reports conveyed that Tripolitania was "overrun" by the Mahdi's emissaries and this external danger had pressured French authorities to grant an extended three-month window of amnesty to Tunisian refugees.⁶⁸ While the French viewed those who returned to Tunisia as accepting French authority, those who willingly stayed in Tripolitania were categorized as "rebels."⁶⁹ According to French reports, approximately 118,000 Tunisians had returned to their homelands, leaving approximately 130,000 refugees within Tripolitania.⁷⁰ Accounting for the lingering danger of having a large concentration of armed horsemen circulating between Tripolitania and Tunisia, French authorities had envisioned this amnesty as part of a greater implementation to clear out the zone of "insurgents" and future obstructions to French expansionist plans. However, amnesty had the opposite effect on the Warghamma. Granting amnesty had given the tribal federation a means to have sanctuary within their own territories in Tunisia (Figure 2) and establish a base of operations to launch continual horseback raids across the border and deep within Tripolitania.⁷¹



Figure 2: Late nineteenth-century postcard of Ksar-Beni-Barka – one of the Warghamma federation’s outposts in Tunisia. (Collection of the author)

The federation’s smallest tribe consisted of 35,000 members whose mobility allowed them to continue their operations of surveying, raiding, and controlling the region between southern Tunisia to territories within Tripolitania.⁷² These territorial skirmishes were indicative of the difficulty of upholding imperial sovereignty, as neither the Ottomans nor the French had sufficient regional influence to maintain active security in these areas.

In fact, the Warghamma had unwittingly played into French designs to ensure that the regions of Zuwara and Nalut (Figure 3) were not under Ottoman sovereignty. These two towns in Tripolitania were at once frequented and controlled by the Warghamma and, at the same time, supported French claims that they belonged to French-occupied Tunisia.⁷³ In such a way, the mobile boundary, composed of constant in-and-out movements and waves of raids conducted by the Warghamma, had exposed a severe vulnerability in Ottoman regional governance. These towns and their surroundings were left unprotected by the Ottoman military, lacked the necessary infrastructure to showcase Ottoman effective occupation, and, more importantly, failed to sustain a sufficiently large population to support imperial claims that they were “settled” Ottoman territories. In the context of the Scramble for Africa, these two towns embodied the characteristics of a region understood under imperial consensus as being unoccupied or

“empty.” Warghamma activities had exposed fundamental vulnerabilities that left these territories susceptible to French occupation and legitimate annexation to Tunisia. Due to the mobile boundary, the French had the means to declare the land unsettled and uncivilized – purportedly fueled by “banditry” and “savagery” – and justify France’s “civilized” occupation. In the global context of the Scramble for Africa, these competing disputes concerning the cartographies of empire between the French and the Ottomans invoked a projection of imagined fiscal and administrative control over a porous region that at once was believed to be occupied by nomadic communities and refugees but possessed an undefined imperial status.



Figure 3: Ottoman map illustrating the major cities separating the lands between Tripolitania and Tunisia. (BOA, HRT.h. 647 [29 Zilhicce 1307 (16 August 1890)])

OTTOMANS REDIRECTING MOBILITY: EFFECTIVE OCCUPATION THROUGH MILITARIZED SETTLER COLONIES

In face of these developments that occurred with the increased presence of the Warghamma tribe, the Ottoman response to the French threat and Warghamma raids was two-fold. First, Ottoman authorities drew up plans to establish a visible and physical presence of Ottoman sovereignty within the western territories of Tripolitania. These new designs (Figure 4) consisted of building stationary, walled citadels or military outposts along the path leading from Zuwara to Ghadames.⁷⁴ For all intents and purposes, these numerous citadels not only projected Ottoman military might but also embodied an immobile imperial architecture to all gazing upon it. These outposts made inhabitants constantly aware of the Ottoman imperial presence in the

region through the display of Ottoman troops, imperial insignias, flags, and walled administrative structures.⁷⁵ These citadels also provided the necessary structures to house battalions of Ottoman infantry and cavalry in defense of the region from the Warghamma, its tribal allies, and the French.⁷⁶ As a projection of military might and the civilizing influences that the Ottomans spread, these citadels were more than military establishments, but a physical manifestation of sovereignty and imperial control.

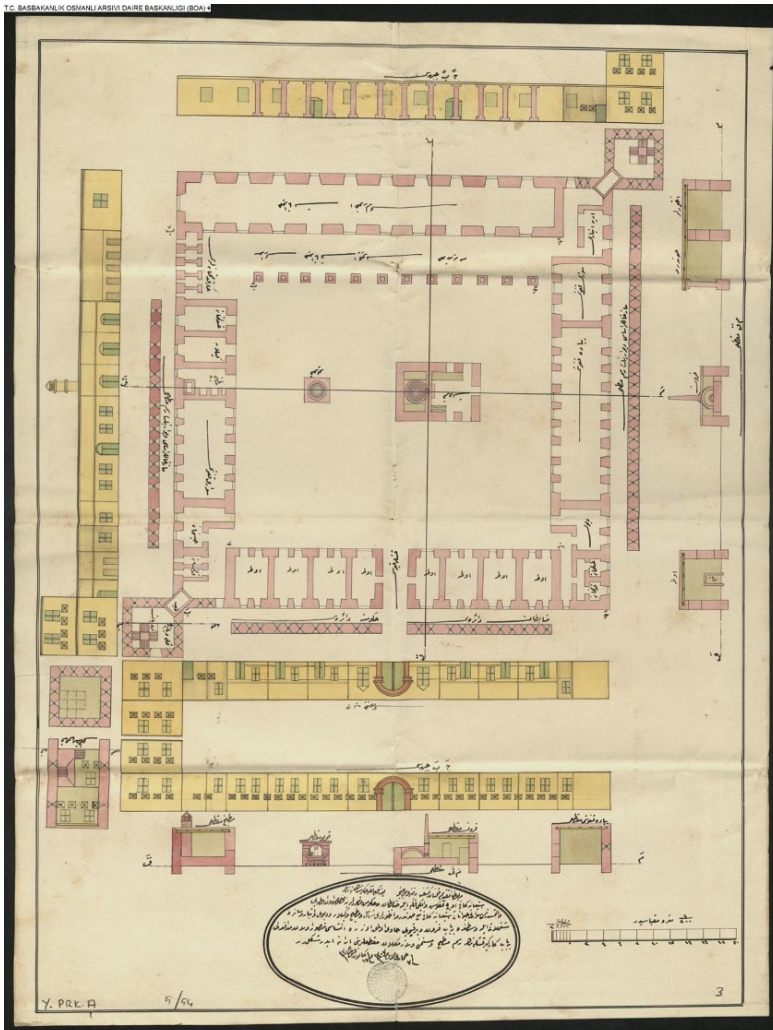


Figure 4: Blueprint of one of the many planned Ottoman outposts designed to delimit the Tripolitania-Tunisia borderland. (BOA, Y.PRK.A, 5-54 [20 Cemazeyilevvel 1307 (12 January 1890)])

Next, Ottoman authorities turned their attention to bolstering local infrastructure and recruiting local inhabitants to strengthen the empire's appearance of effective occupation. This support came in the form of providing modern firearms and sufficient ammunition to settled local inhabitants (*ahali*) who resided in the villages between Tripolitania and Tunisia to help fight against the Warghamma tribe.⁷⁷ Frequent attacks by the Warghamma on the settled populations of western Tripolitania had affected their capability to carry out local agricultural production and exportation of valuable cash crop commodities to the Tripolitanian coast. The commander of the Ottoman military (*serasker*) in Tripoli and the Ottoman High Court of Justice (*meclis-i vala*) had specifically designated the towns of Zuwara, Nalut, and Jadu as critical regions in need of defense.⁷⁸ As a defensive measure, Ottoman authorities sent 10,000 Snider rifles to inhabitants residing in these territories and armed 200 to 300 locals in each town deemed at risk of banditry or invasion.⁷⁹ These measures constituted a means for the Ottoman government in Tripoli to exert pressure on the Warghamma to stem the amount of raiding and murders that were understood by authorities as continuing "ancient habits of the tribes."⁸⁰ This new Ottoman auxiliary force composed of locally armed villagers and farmers supported imperial plans to extend the Ottoman military wall to include surrounding villages that introduced a defensive network—an attempt to solidify what was flourishing as a mobile boundary.

Ensuring that these developments were positive additions to the local security of the region, the town of Zuwara came under scrutiny with an official visit by Commander Osman Pasha (*ferik*). Osman Pasha had arrived at Zuwara with an entourage of 150 horsemen composed of nomads (*urban*), shaykhs (*meşayih*), and notables (*muteberan*).⁸¹ After a local display of horseback competition and celebration, these visitors along with other inhabitants of Zuwara prayed for the sultan publicly and acknowledged their loyalty. Next, Osman Pasha saw to their firearm training (*silah talimi*) and noted the strongpoints and vulnerabilities of this specific town.⁸² Rather than pay due attention to the Sahara, which he noted was always a vulnerable point for invasion, Osman Pasha drew attention to the sea and vulnerability of the town to coastal attack by the French and Italians.⁸³ The lack of a port at Zuwara, he argued, necessitated new measures for defense to close the gap from Zuwara to Crete thus extending the zone of Tripolitania to the waters of the eastern Mediterranean.⁸⁴ The combination of Ottoman troops, local auxiliary formations, and warships presented a solution to enclose the region and answer for

what the commander deemed as a “perceptible” (*açık*) vulnerability to losing sovereignty in the region.

Now, Ottoman attempts to create a preventative boundary from Zuwara to Ghadames presented a heightened Ottoman military presence along a makeshift borderland. This preventative boundary helped authorities police “natives” and stop them from conducting insurgent activities just as they satisfied the global implications set forth by the Scramble for Africa of settling empty lands through effective military occupation. With the armed occupation of fertile lands, date trees, and access to water, impairing mobility through military settlement founded a more effective Ottoman countermeasure to the mobile boundary engendered by the Warghamma and other tribes.⁸⁵ While more than 100,000 Tunisians had previously returned to Tunisia, the Ottoman government in Tripoli still maintained responsibility for caring for tens of thousands more Tunisian refugees who resided in the province. To prevent the formation of a possible insurgency, these remaining refugees were scattered and settled across the territory to show that the lands were now settled and populated with purportedly loyal “Ottomans.” Rasim Pasha, the governor of Tripoli at the time, reinforced this settlement policy by sending battalions of Ottoman soldiers along with Tunisian refugees to establish settler colonies in Ghadames, Ghat, and other regions that were in danger of French invasion or Warghamma raids.⁸⁶

The Ottoman central government and the provincial government in Tripoli essentially filled in the gaps where regions deemed “empty” by French authorities were now occupied with Ottoman military personnel, armed locals, and tens of thousands of refugee settlers. The establishment of numerous settler colonies of Tunisian refugees frustrated French claims to areas along western Tripolitania that were deemed Tunisian. Likewise, these new settler colonies created a defensive buffer against attacks coming from the Warghamma federation and its allies. What effectively began as a mobile boundary – lands fluidly traversed by various nomadic, tribal, and refugee populations on the move – slowly transformed into a borderland that was delineated by Ottoman military citadels, armed locals, and refugee-settler colonies. The citadels were not only a defensive bastion protecting the Ottomans from outside forces but also served against those tribes who raided from the inside giving the conception of a dotted border (*hattıfasıl*) extending north to south.⁸⁷ More so, the employment of refugees in agriculture and their protection by local garrisons gave the appearance of populated and industriously working settler colonies. While still under the threat by

the Warghamma, the now occupied gaps within the Tripolitania-Tunisia borderland helped limit French interference and gave some assurance to imperial officials that such infrastructural adjustments produced recognizable aspects of what delineated a valid claim to a border.

By 1893, as Ottoman and French committee members failed to reach an agreement on the Tripolitania-Tunisia border, Ottoman authorities were already deliberating its demarcation. The Grand Vizier and representatives of every ministry had come to a consensus that the border (*hattıfâsıl*) fell indeed where the citadels and Tunisian refugee settlements were created just a few years earlier.⁸⁸ This plan to determine the location of the border was strongly connected to Ottoman responses to Warghamma mobility, the mobile boundary between Tripolitania and Tunisia, and Tunisian refugee settlement—all of which continued to frustrate interimperial cartographic plans until 1910. While the French rejected Ottoman schematics of a border, the significant ramifications of more than a decade's worth of caring for, fending off, and eventually employing tribal federations and refugees had played a constitutive role in shaping and redefining Ottoman and French imperial conceptions of the Tripolitania-Tunisian border.⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

This study of how the shifting dynamics and interactions of various nomadic, tribal, and refugee populations actively reconfigured imperial cartographic conceptions of the Tripolitania-Tunisia border reveals the multifaceted responses of non-state actors to imperial expansionism and attempts at territorial control. By considering the agency and mobility of these groups, it underscores how their fluid identities and localized forms of resistance created a mobile boundary and disrupted imperial visions of order, leading to a nuanced interplay of adaptation, confrontation, and negotiation. By focusing on mobility in the late Ottoman Empire and the making of a mobile boundary in North Africa, it articulates the key role that population movements played in the making, remaking, and unmaking of the Tripolitania-Tunisia borderland from 1881 until 1893. The French invasion of Tunisia in 1881 may have caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Tunisians, but the specific way in which Tunisian “nomads-cum-refugees” created a mobile boundary and resisted imperial cartographic schemes in the late nineteenth century highlights their role in stifling and even shaping state-centered agendas. Ottoman authorities aimed to transform tribal communities like the

Warghamma into loyal refugee-settlers (*muhacir*), hoping that a “settled” population of Tunisians would solidify Ottoman claims to the border region, in accordance with contemporary ideas of international law. However, the Warghamma, deprived of their livelihoods and land in Tunisia, engaged in various forms of economic and political violence in Ottoman Tripolitania, particularly targeting communities in the mobile boundary.

Late nineteenth-century federations such as the Warghamma constituted an amalgamated assortment of local interests that at once adapted and rejected Ottoman categorizations of the refugee-settler (*muhacir*) and the nomad (*urban*). For those who refused settlement, they maintained their own local autonomy albeit within Ottoman-French “occupied” lands. The nomad-cum-refugee, a designation and combination that ran contrary to administrative Ottoman conceptions of the *muhacir*, constituted the central force that exacerbated imperial tensions over creating a static border because of their divided loyalties, skeptical acculturation to Ottoman-French subjecthood, and local conceptions of loyalty. These nomads-cum-refugees augmented imperial authorities’ anxieties because of their navigational mastery, horseback movement, and knowledge and monopolization of the land.

This article advances the scholarly conversation about refugees, tribal mobility, and state-making in the late Ottoman Empire, during a time of intensifying interimperial competition. Its attention to North Africa extends the scope of the field that has focused, especially among Ottomanists, disproportionately on Caucasian migrants, Anatolia, and the Mashriq. More importantly, this article inserts the Tripolitania-Tunisia mobile boundary into a wider scope of scholarship about mobility, settlement, migration, and sovereignty in the late imperial context. By situating North Africa within this broader discourse, it not only addresses a significant gap in the existing literature but also redefines the scope of refugee and migration studies by highlighting the region’s pivotal role in shaping global patterns of displacement and movement. In doing so, it challenges prevailing frameworks and calls for a more nuanced understanding of the entangled histories of migration, refugeedom, and statecraft. This analysis not only urges a reconsideration of the regional complexities that underline migration flows but also paves the way for future scholarship to explore the often-overlooked intersection of local agency, imperial control, and transregional mobility, thus expanding the theoretical and empirical horizons of the field.

NOTES

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Beyza Lorenz, Michael O'Sullivan, Chris Rominger, and Toulouse-Antonin Roy for their invaluable support and feedback. I am also grateful to the editors at *Mashriq & Mahjar* and the three anonymous peer reviewers for their generous and insightful comments on drafts of this article. Their contributions have greatly enriched this work.

² Y.PRK.AZJ. 5–18 (29 Rabiulahir 1299 [20 March 1882]), Presidential Ottoman Archives, Istanbul, Türkiye (hereafter BOA).

³ Michel F. Le Gall's thorough analysis of Ottoman-French negotiations in the 1890s offers a concise political history of Tripolitania-Tunisia border negotiations between the Ottomans and the French. His focus on cartography and formal parlance between both empires frames the making of the border as a result of a series of imperial diplomatic maneuvers. See Michel F. Le Gall, "Pashas, Bedouin and Notables: Ottoman Administration in Tripoli and Benghazi, 1881–1902" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1986), 38–54. See also Abdurrahman Çaycı, *La Question tunisienne et la politique ottoman (1881–1913)* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1963), 98–102.

⁴ Georg Friedrich von Martens, *Nouveau recueil général de traités et autres actes relatifs aux rapports de droit international*, 3 (Leipzig: Librairie de Dieterich, 1913), 7:91–93.

⁵ Samuel Dolbee, *Locusts of Power: Borders, Empire, and Environment in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 13, 40–41.

⁶ Isa Blumi, "Illicit Trade and the Emergence of Albania and Yemen," in *Understanding Life in the Borderlands: Boundaries in Depth and in Motion*, ed. I. William Zartman (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 58–84.

⁷ Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), xvi.

⁸ Scholars have debated the Ottoman Turkish term, *muhacir* (Arabic: *muhajir*), which has been translated to signify migrant, refugee, settler, and, more recently, refugee-turned-settler. For example, see Fredrick Walter Lorenz, "A Taste of Empire: Sacred Bread, Refugees, and the Making of Ottoman Imperial Subjects," *Global Food History* (2025): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2025.2468154>; Ella Fratantuono, *Governing Migration in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024); and Fredrick Walter Lorenz, "The 'Second Egypt': Cretan Refugees, Agricultural Development, and Frontier Expansion in Ottoman Cyrenaica, 1897–1904," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 1 (2021): 89–104.

⁹ Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, *Empire of Refugees: North Caucasian Muslims and the Late Ottoman State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024).

¹⁰ In this article, I use the term “Tunisian” to refer to the inhabitants of the Regency of Tunis living in lands under French or Ottoman rule wherein their political, social, and cultural status and identities blurred and connected to autonomous social groupings that recognized or rejected Ottoman or French subjecthood. Ottoman governmental correspondences referred to these populations as “*Tunus urbanu*” and “*Tunus muhacirleri*.”

¹¹ The common denominator for studies of Ottoman refugees and settlers (*muhajir* in Arabic and *muhacir* in Turkish) has been settlement in Anatolia and Syria with most studies focusing on the migrations from the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the eastern Mediterranean with limited studies on migration from Algeria to Palestine – all of which have resulted from warfare and the loss of Ottoman territory. For instance, see David Grossman, *Rural Arab Demography and Early Jewish Settlement in Palestine* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 44–52; Rina Cohen, “The Moghrabi Jews in Palestine (1830–1903): A Challenge for the French Protectorate,” *Archives Juives* 38 (2005): 28–46; Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995); Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 11, 70; and Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 2:115–118.

¹² The integrity of the tribal alliance, while difficult to maintain, remained a key interest among shaykhs in a tribal confederacy. For instance, see Yoav Alon, “Sheikh and Pasha: Ottoman Government in the Syrian Desert and the Creation of Modern Tribal Leadership,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 59, no. 3 (2016): 447–48; and Yuval Ben-Bassat, “Bedouin Petitions from Late Ottoman Palestine: Evaluating the Effects of Sedentarization,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 58, no. 1/2 (2015): 148.

¹³ For the French and the Ottomans, the term “nomad” was used as a pejorative – a governmental way of categorizing populations as “uncivilized,” “unproductive,” and in need of “civilization.” For instance, see Andrea E. Duffy, *Nomad’s Land: Pastoralism and French Environmental Policy in the Nineteenth-Century Mediterranean World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019); and Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003): 311–42.

¹⁴ The French model of conquering land and its peoples by sword and plow constituted a strategy to colonize Algeria from the 1830s. In the context of Tunisia, French authorities also evaluated to what extent similar stratagems could be carried out in neighboring Tunisia albeit as a protectorate rather than as an annexed space. See Jennifer E. Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), chap. 4.

¹⁵ See Lorenz, “Second Egypt”; and Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

¹⁶ For instance, see Reşat Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 104–6; and Nora Lafi, *Une ville du Maghreb entre ancien régime et réformes ottomans* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002), 185.

¹⁷ In the context of Greater Syria and the Jazira, Ottoman functionaries disputed and partnered with Bedouin tribes as a strategy for Muslim unity and a chance to integrate them into the state apparatus. For instance, see Samuel Dolbee, *Locusts of Power*; Nora Elizabeth Barakat, *Bedouin Bureaucrats: Mobility and Property in the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023); M. Talha Çiçek, *Negotiating Empire in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); and Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 70–94.

¹⁸ E. G. H. Joffé, “Social and Political Structures in the Jafara Plain in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *Social & Economic Development of Libya*, eds. E. G. H. Joffé and K. S. McLachlan (Cambridgeshire: Middle East & North African Studies Press, 1982), 31.

¹⁹ For instance, see ‘Ali ‘Umar Al-Hazil, *al-Nizam al-qada’i fi wilayat Tarabulus al-gharb fi al-‘ahd al-‘uthmani al-thani, 1835–1869* (Tarabulus: Markaz jihad al-libiyiin lil-dirasat al-tarikhiya, 2009), 211; Jibril Muhammad Al-Khufayfi, *al-Nizam al-Daribi fi wilayat Tarabulus al-Gharb 1835–1912* (Benghazi: Dar al-kitab al-wataniya, 2000), 21–22; and ‘Abdallah ‘Ali Ibrahim, “Evolution of Government and Society in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (Libya) 1835–1911” (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1982), 153.

²⁰ The interests of these federations were at times aligned and in contradiction to Ottoman interests. Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya* (Albany: SUNY Press 2009), 11.

²¹ Robert J. Miller and Olivia Stitz, “The International Law of Colonialism in East Africa: Germany, England, and the Doctrine of Discovery,” *Duke Journal of Comparative & International Law* 32, no. 1 (2021): 3–7 and 45–49.

²² See Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 53–74; and Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (New York: Cassell, 1999), 163.

²³ Minawi, *Ottoman Scramble*, 10.

²⁴ Chris Gratien, *The Unsettled Plain: An Environmental History of the Late Ottoman Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022).

²⁵ BOA, MVL. 19–78 (19 Zilkade 1263 [29 February 1847]).

²⁶ Fredrick Walter Lorenz, “An Empire of Frontiers: Between Migrant and State in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1835–1911” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2022).

²⁷ Deringil, “Nomadism and Savagery,” 311–42.

²⁸ Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002): 768–96.

²⁹ BOA, MVL. 27–5 (08 Şaban 1264 [22 July 1847]).

³⁰ Engin Deniz Akarlı, “The Defence of the Libyan Provinces (1882–1908),” in *Studies on Ottoman Diplomatic History*, eds. Selim Deringil and Sinan Küneralp (Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 1990), 75–85.

³¹ Rifaat Abou-El-Haj, “An Agenda for Research in History: The History of Libya between the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15 (1983): 314.

³² Matthew H. Ellis, *Desert Borderland: The Making of Modern Egypt and Libya* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 9.

³³ Hélène Blais, “An Intra-Imperial Conflict: The Mapping of the Border Between Algeria and Tunisia, 1881–1914,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 37 (2011): 178–90.

³⁴ Mary Dewhurst Lewis’s work has elucidated French imperial interests in occupying Tunisia and converting it into a protectorate. Among these reasons to invade Tunisia in 1881 was the French anxiety that Italy would have led an invasion if the French stalled – especially given that most European migrants residing along Tunisian coastlines were Italian and not French. See Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

³⁵ Numbers differ but according to André Martel, the Ottomans estimated 250,000: 50,000 from Matmata, 70,000 Warghamma, 52,000 Hamama, 20,000 Jalass, and 10,000 Naffat. See André Martel, *Les confins saharo-tripolitains de la Tunisie (1881–1911)*, 2 vols. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1965), Vol. 1: 290.

³⁶ The tribal confederation of the Warghamma is also referred to as “les Ouerghemma” or “les Ouderna” in French. This article will adapt the Arabic transliteration of Warghamma rather than Vergama as observed in Ottoman Turkish. The French also referred to the mountainous region of southern Tunisia as Ouerghemma (see map in Figure 1).

³⁷ Martel, *Les confins*, 309.

³⁸ Martel, 309.

³⁹ In this particular case, that occurred in 1881, Mr. Duplessis had received a concession for a mountain territory that overlapped with the Ouerghemma, Bou-Hedma, Madjourah, El-Ayaïcha and Hadd’at – all territories that were in the south of Tunisia. See *Akhbar: Journal de l’Algérie*, 14 March 1886; and “Tunis,” *Evening Mail* (London), 20 March 1882.

⁴⁰ “The War in Tunis,” *Evening Mail* (London), 26 December 1881.

⁴¹ BOA, Y.EE.103–12 (14 Cemazeyilevvel 1298 [14 April 1881]).

⁴² Lorenz, “Second Egypt.”

⁴³ Abdurrahman Çaycı, *Büyük Sahra’da Türk-Fransız rekabeti (1858–1911)* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1970), 69.

⁴⁴ BOA, Y.A.HUS. 167–50 (29 Cemazeyilevvel 1298 [29 April 1881]).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Le Gall, "Pashas," 37.

⁴⁷ For instance, see *Table générale des tomes I à XX de la revue tunisienne* (Tunis: Hôtel des Sociétés françaises, 1914), 118; Gabriel Charmes, *La Tunisie et la Tripolitaine* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1883), 214; and R. Lambert Playfair, *Travels in the Footsteps of Bruce in Algeria and Tunis* (London: C. Kegan Paul, 1877), 118.

⁴⁸ *Bulletin de la Direction de l'agriculture et du commerce ('puis' de l'agriculture, du commerce et de la colonisation)* 12 (15 July 1899): 71–72; and Charmes, *La Tunisie et la Tripolitaine*, 214.

⁴⁹ *Historique du Bureau des Affaires indigènes de Médenine* (Bourg: Victor Berthod, 1931), app. 1.

⁵⁰ For instance, French missionaries sought to spread propaganda that those of the Djebalia would be seen as equals to their former "oppressors," the Warghamma, and could conduct trade, avoid punishment, and even marry their sons and daughters to other communities if they wished without the approval of their former overlords. See *Les Missions catholiques: Bulletin hebdomadaire illustré de l'oeuvre de la propagation de la foi* 24 (January–December 1892): 294.

⁵¹ BOA, ŞD. 285–17 (28 Rabiulevvel 1298 [28 February 1881]).

⁵² BOA, İ.ŞD. 53–2996 (12 Rabiulahir 1298 [8 March 1881]).

⁵³ These Warghamma raids on the Siy'an occurred repeatedly over the next two decades with casualties experienced on both sides along with the reported deaths of some of the Siy'an shaykhs. For instance, see BOA, ŞD. 285–17 (28 Rabiulevvel 1298 [28 February 1881]); and "Disturbances on the Tunisian Frontier," *Morning Post* (London), 3 April 1897.

⁵⁴ BOA, ŞD. 285–17 (28 Rabiulevvel 1298 [28 February 1881]).

⁵⁵ BOA, Y.PRK.UM. 4–65 (29 Şaban 1298 [27 July 1881]). In other contexts, such as in Jerusalem, the *mutasarrif* personally distributed presents to win over shaykhs to increase loyalty among the bedouin. See Yasemin Avcı, "The Application of Tanzimat in the Desert: The Bedouins and the Creation of a New Town in Southern Palestine (1860–1914)," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 6 (2009): 969–83.

⁵⁶ In the context of the Mashriq, these tactics went as far as to create titles such as "paramount" shaykh (*shaykh al-mashāyikh*). See Alon, "Sheikh and Pasha," 442–72.

⁵⁷ BOA, İ.DH. 1295–101962 (14 Zilhicce 1298 [7 November 1881]).

⁵⁸ BOA, A.MKT.MHM. 486–85 (15 Zilhicce 1298 [8 November 1881]).

⁵⁹ BOA, HR.SYS. 1619–12 (6 Cemazeyilevvel 1299 [26 March 1882]).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² BOA, Y.MTV. 8–100 (15 Cemazeyilevvel 1299 [4 April 1882]).

- ⁶³ BOA, Y.MTV. 9–25 (24 Cemazeyilahir 1299 [13 May 1882]).
- ⁶⁴ BOA, Y.A. HUS. 170–60 (20 Recep 1299 [7 June 1882]).
- ⁶⁵ BOA, ŞD. 2325–63 (29 Recep 1299 [16 June 1882]).
- ⁶⁶ BOA, HR.TH. 44–64 (16 Zilhicce 1299 [29 October 1882]).
- ⁶⁷ Çaycı, *Büyük Sahra'da*, 70.
- ⁶⁸ “Tunis,” *Morning Post* (London), 16 January 1885; and “Tripoli, Tunis, and the Mahdi,” *Daily Telegraph & Courier* (London), 11 March 1885.
- ⁶⁹ “Tunis,” *Morning Post* (London), 16 January 1885.
- ⁷⁰ For instance, see Le Gall, “Pashas,” 37; and André Martel, *A l'arrière-plan des relations franco-maghrébines (1830–1881): Luis-Arnold et Joseph Allegro, Consuls du Bey de Tunis À Bône* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 289.
- ⁷¹ Such clashes often occurred in Zuwara and caused casualties on both sides. For instance, see BOA, DH.MKT. 1351–86 (19 Ramazan 1303 [21 June 1886]).
- ⁷² See Martel, *Les confins*, 66–88; H. M. Government, *A Handbook of Libya* (London, Naval Staff, Intelligence Division, 1917), 38–44; Jean Ganiage, *Les origines du protectorat français en Tunisie* (Tunis: Maison tunisienne de l'édition, 1968), 150–53; and Joffé, “Social and Political Structures.”
- ⁷³ BOA, MV. 21–6 (28 Ramazan 1304 [20 June 1887]).
- ⁷⁴ BOA, Y.EE. 1–4 (6 Rabiulahir 1305 [22 December 1887]).
- ⁷⁵ Such a display of imperial objects in the late nineteenth century was a way in which global empires reinforced imperial modes of representation by making these objects front and center in local colonial contexts. For instance, see Alvita Akiboh, *Imperial Material: National Symbols in the US Colonial Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023).
- ⁷⁶ BOA, Y.PRK.UM. 10–102 (25 Rabiulahir 1305 [10 January 1888]).
- ⁷⁷ See BOA, A.MKT.MHM. 497–14 (22 Şaban 1305 [4 May 1888]); and BOA, DH.MKT. 1504–15 (14 Şaban 1305 [26 April 1888]).
- ⁷⁸ BOA, MV. 31–60 (21 Şaban 1305 [3 May 1888]).
- ⁷⁹ BOA, MV. 32–49 (9 Ramazan 1305 [20 May 1888]).
- ⁸⁰ BOA, Y.PRK.A 5–54 (20 Cemazeyilevvel 1307 [12 January 1890]).
- ⁸¹ BOA, Y.PRK.ASK. 67–59 (20 Rabiulahir 1308 [3 December 1890]).
- ⁸² *Ibid.*
- ⁸³ BOA, Y.MTV. 47–96 (2 Cemazeyilahir 1308 [13 January 1891]).
- ⁸⁴ BOA, Y.MTV. 47–125 (13 Cemazeyilahir 1308 [24 January 1891]). Crete played a pivotal role as a strategic base for Ottoman operations in the eastern Mediterranean, essential to the empire's defense. Uğur Zekeriya Peçe, *Island and Empire: How Civil War in Crete Mobilized the Ottoman World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024).

⁸⁵ BOA, Y.PRK.A. 5–54 (20 Kanunuevvel 1305 [22 December 1889]).

⁸⁶ BOA, Y.EE. 139–82 (23 Recep 1308 [4 March 1891]).

⁸⁷ BOA, İ.HR. 339–42 (1 Rabiulevvel 1310 [23 September 1892]).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ BOA, Y.EE. 103–20 (6 Zilkade 1310 [22 May 1893]).