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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

PUBLIC OPINION AND THE CRETAN QUESTION: A BRITISH PRESS PERSPECTIVE*

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Abstract

The Cretan revolt of 1897–98 occurred during a period of significant transformation in European political culture, shaped by the rise of mass journalism, expanding communication technologies, and an increasingly engaged reading public. British newspapers played a central role in mediating the revolt for domestic audiences, translating a complex provincial conflict into a moralized narrative of civilizational struggle. Reporting drew heavily on established philhellenic and Orientalist frameworks, depicting Cretan insurgents as legitimate agents of national self-determination and portraying Ottoman authority as anachronistic or inherently disorderly. Coverage of violence displayed marked asymmetry: Muslim attacks on Christian communities received sustained and emotive attention, whereas Christian violence against Muslims was minimized, questioned, or reframed. This selective framing contributed to a hierarchy of suffering that aligned with the expectations of late Victorian readers and intensified humanitarian outrage, especially following the Candia massacre. By criticizing the perceived hesitancy of the Great Powers—particularly Germany and Austria—newspapers further undermined confidence in the Concert of Europe and advanced an alternative vision of international order rooted in national self-determination and moral interventionism. This work underscores how mass journalism shaped public understanding of the Eastern Mediterranean over the Crete, constrained diplomatic flexibility, and reframed the revolt as a test of European identity and political responsibility at the fin de siècle.

Keywords: *Cretan Revolt (1897–98), British Press, Public Opinion, Public Diplomacy, Ottoman Empire.*

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Bu makalede Etik Kurul Onayı gerektiren bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır.

There is no study that would require the approval of the Ethical Committee in this article.

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KAMUOYU VE GİRİT SORUNU: İNGİLİZ BASINININ BAKIŞ AÇISI

Öz

1897-98 Girit isyanı, Avrupa siyasi kültürünün kitle gazeteciliğinin yükselişi, iletişim teknolojilerindeki hızlanma ve giderek genişleyen bir okuyucu kitlesi tarafından şekillendiği bir dönemde ortaya çıkmıştır. Britanya gazeteleri, bu karmaşık taşra çatışmasını yerel okurlara aktarma sürecinde belirleyici bir rol üstlenmiş; olayı medeniyetler arası bir mücadele olarak çerçeveleyen ahlaki bir anlatıya dönüştürmüştür. Haber söylemi, kökleşmiş filhelenist ve Oryantalist kalıplardan beslenmiş; Giritli isyancılar ulusal öz-yönetimin meşru temsilcileri olarak sunulurken, Osmanlı otoritesi çoğunlukla anakronik veya düzen sağlayamaz bir yapı olarak tasvir edilmiştir. Şiddet haberlerinde belirgin bir asimetri göze çarpar: Müslümanların Hristiyanlara yönelik saldırıları yoğun ve duygusal bir tonla aktarılırken, Hristiyan grupların Müslümanlara yönelik şiddeti küçümsemiş, şüpheli görülmüş veya yeniden çerçevelenmiştir. Bu seçici temsil, dönemin okur beklentileriyle uyumlu bir “mağduriyet hiyerarşisi” üretmiş ve özellikle Kandiye vakası sonrasında insani tepkiyi güçlendirmiştir. Büyük Güçlerin –özellikle Almanya ve Avusturya’nın– çekimser tutumuna yönelik eleştiriler ise Avrupa Uyumunun etkinliğine dair kuşkuları artırmış ve ulusal öz-belirlenim ile ahlaki müdahalecilik temelli alternatif bir uluslararası düzen anlayışını öne çıkarmıştır. Bu çalışma, kitle gazeteciliğinin Girit üzerinden Doğu Akdeniz’e ilişkin kamuoyu algılarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini, diplomatik esnekliği nasıl daralttığını ve isyanı dönemin Avrupa kimliği ile siyasi sorumluluğuna dair bir sınama haline getirdiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Girit İsyanı (1897-98), İngiliz Basını, Kamuoyu, Kamu Diplomasisi, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu.*

Introduction

The Cretan revolt of 1897–98 erupted at a moment when European political culture was undergoing profound transformation. The rapid expansion of mass journalism, the acceleration of news transmission technologies, and the rise of an increasingly vocal middle-class readership reshaped how international crises were communicated, interpreted, and debated across the continent. In Britain—where policymakers traditionally regarded the Ottoman Empire as a strategic buffer within the balance-of-power system—the revolt quickly became a site through which competing ideas about national identity, empire, humanitarianism, and public diplomacy were articulated. Although the Cretan Question had long occupied European statesmen, its late nineteenth-century iteration unfolded within a radically altered media environment. Newspapers, rather than diplomats, increasingly mediated the terms through which the crisis was understood. This article examines how British newspapers constructed and popularized narratives of the revolt, with particular attention to discourses of violence, rebellion, and lawlessness. By analyzing a broad spectrum of publications—from elite political dailies such as *The Times* and *The Economist* to mass-circulation illustrated periodicals including *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News*—the study explores the interpretive frameworks that rendered the conflict legible to Western European audiences. Philhellenism, Orientalism, Christian humanitarianism, and the emerging logics of popular nationalism all played formative roles in shaping these representations. While newspapers constituted only one element of the wider public sphere, their unprecedented reach and their self-appointed status as the “voice of the nation” make them indispensable sources for understanding how British public opinion responded to the crisis. Rather than treating the press as a passive reflector of elite policy, this study approaches newspapers as active producers of meaning—institutions that shaped popular expectations, constrained governmental options, and exerted pressure on foreign-policy decision-making by framing the moral vocabulary through which the revolt was interpreted. The Cretan case therefore offers a valuable lens through which to reassess the late nineteenth century as a period in which popular media increasingly contested the authority of the Concert of Europe and challenged established diplomatic practices.

Methodologically, the analysis draws on a targeted sample of British and French newspapers contemporary to the revolt. Relevant articles were identified through keyword searches, while brief wire reports lacking substantive commentary were excluded, as their contents were typically elaborated in subsequent issues. Particular attention is given to the assumptions embedded within news narratives—assumptions shaped by the conventions of New Journalism, the sensationalization of violence, and the broader discursive environment surrounding the Eastern Question, the

nature of “the Oriental,” and European-Christian identity. By situating media narratives within these broader cultural and political contexts, the article contributes to three interconnected fields: the study of nineteenth-century British attitudes toward the Ottoman Empire; the evolution of public opinion and media politics in fin-de-siècle Europe; and the role of mass journalism as an increasingly consequential actor in international relations. Together, these perspectives illuminate how the Cretan revolt was transformed from a regional uprising into a European political drama, interpreted, debated, and ultimately reshaped by the machinery of the popular press. Despite a substantial historiography on the Eastern Question and on European diplomacy in the late nineteenth century, scholars have paid comparatively little attention to how mass journalism shaped popular understandings of the Cretan revolt and influenced the political constraints under which governments operated. Most existing accounts privilege diplomatic correspondence or high-political narratives, thereby treating the press as a secondary or reactive force. This approach obscures the extent to which newspapers—through their framing of violence, rebellion, and “Oriental” disorder—generated public expectations that limited British flexibility and contributed to the erosion of confidence in the Concert of Europe as a viable system of international order.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative discourse-analytical approach to examine how British newspapers framed the Cretan revolt of 1897–98 and constructed narratives about violence, order, and international responsibility within the late Victorian public sphere. The primary sources consist of British newspapers published during the revolt, selected to capture a broad spectrum of editorial orientations and media formats characteristic of New Journalism. The sample includes *The Economist*, *The Times*, *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Liverpool Mercury*, *London Evening Standard*, *Punch*, *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, *St James’s Gazette*, and *The Illustrated London News*. These titles collectively represent elite political commentary, liberal advocacy journalism, and mass-circulation illustrated periodicals, thereby allowing for the comparison of representational practices across differing political agendas and readerships. Articles were identified through keyword searches related to Crete, the Ottoman Empire, Greece, insurgency, violence, and international intervention. To ensure analytical depth, only items providing interpretive commentary—such as extended reports, editorials, illustrations, and opinion pieces—were included, while brief wire notices or telegrams lacking substantive analysis were excluded. This selection strategy reflects the assumption that the interpretive frames shaping public opinion were most clearly articulated in genres designed to contextualize, moralize, or dramatize unfolding events.

The analysis focuses on the discursive strategies through which newspapers constructed moral hierarchies, national identities, and civilizational claims. Drawing on concepts from media studies—particularly framing theory, outrage journalism, and scholarship on the political role of the nineteenth-century press—the study identifies recurring narrative patterns, rhetorical tropes, and visual motifs. Attention is given to how these devices drew upon broader intellectual currents, including philhellenism, Orientalism, Christian humanitarianism, and the popular nationalist imaginaries of fin-de-siècle Europe. By treating newspapers not as passive recorders of diplomatic events but as active producers of meaning, the methodology enables a systematic assessment of how journalistic discourse shaped British understandings of the revolt and contributed to shifts in the perceived legitimacy of Ottoman rule, European solidarity, and the Concert of Europe as a mechanism of international order.¹

1. Historical and Diplomatic Background of the Eastern Question

Anglo-Turkish relations progressed unevenly over the course of the nineteenth century. Although the two empires initially drew close in warm cooperation—bound together by their shared hostility toward Russia and by hopes for a reformed, modernizing Ottoman polity—this harmony soon proved fragile. Victorian Britain’s Christian moral outlook and what was perceived as Islamic rule in the Ottoman regime increasingly appeared difficult to reconcile, if not fundamentally at odds.² British backing for the Ottoman Empire emerged within the broader nineteenth-century framework of maintaining the European balance of power. Generally, the statesmen of the Great Powers—Britain, France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia—aimed to prevent any single state from acquiring the overwhelming dominance once achieved by Napoleonic France. In this context, the Ottoman Empire’s progressive decline constituted a latent danger to that equilibrium. The Greek War of Independence, which culminated in success in 1832, inaugurated a prolonged era in which the Great Powers steadily advanced into Ottoman lands. Diplomats across Europe understood that any partitioning or unilateral annexation of the empire’s loosely governed territories could disrupt the fragile balance by disproportionately benefiting one of the contenders.³

- 1 Joel H. Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s-1914: Speed in the Age of Transatlantic Journalism*, *Palgrave Studies in the History of the Media*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 108.
- 2 Rene Albrecht-Carre, *A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna*, (New York: Harper & Row Press, 1958), 43; Joseph Heller, *British Policy Towards the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914*, (London: Frank Cass Press, 1983), 1-2.
- 3 Sir Charles Kingsley Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830-1841: Britain, the Liberal Movement, and the Eastern Question*, Vol. 1, (New York: Humanity Press, 1969), 278-79, 304; Kemal H. Karpat, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, 3 (July, 1972): 250, 255, 259.

Russia stood to benefit most from the Ottoman Empire's growing fragility. Viewing themselves as the rightful successors to Byzantium and the guardians of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Russian leaders had long coveted Constantinople—not only for its symbolic and cultural significance, but also for its strategic value as a warm-water port that would secure direct passage to the Mediterranean.⁴

In 1832, as the forces of Mehmed Ali of Egypt advanced through Syria and appeared poised to penetrate the Anatolian interior, Czar Nicholas I moved swiftly to exploit the resulting instability. A Russian fleet sailed down from the Black Sea and effectively occupied Constantinople, ostensibly to shield the Ottoman government from its Egyptian adversary. Although the Egyptian danger soon receded, Russian forces did not withdraw; instead, in early 1833 they compelled Sultan Mahmud II to conclude the Treaty of Hunkar İskelesi. Under its terms, the Sultan conceded to Russia the authority to intervene in Ottoman affairs whenever the security of his Orthodox subjects was deemed to be at risk. These signs of Ottoman decline caused considerable unease in Britain. Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary, observed that the Treaty of Hunkar İskelesi effectively elevated the Russian ambassador to the position of the Sultan's principal minister. Such a degree of Ottoman dependence on Russia was, in Palmerston's view, intolerable. Control of Constantinople and the Straits would allow Russia to project naval power into the eastern Mediterranean, thereby endangering Britain's vital route to India. In response, Palmerston began shaping a diplomatic strategy aimed at reinforcing the Ottoman Empire and enabling it to withstand Russian encroachment. Thus, when Mehmed Ali once more posed a threat to the Ottomans in 1839, Palmerston stationed a modest British contingent in Syria to halt the Egyptian advance.⁵ However, the direct deployment of British military power offered only a short-term remedy. Given that British naval and human resources were already stretched across a global empire, Britain was in no position to ensure the security of the Ottoman state through sustained force. Moreover, London could not risk provoking the other Great Powers by infringing upon Ottoman sovereignty in the manner Russia had done.⁶

For British policymakers in the age of the Great Reform Act, the remedy appeared straightforward: bolstering the Ottoman Empire required a thorough overhaul of its outdated administrative structures. Palmerston maintained that if the Ottomans could modernize their armed forces and introduce contemporary European practices into their bureaucracy and financial

4 Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Palmerston, 1830-1841: Britain, the Liberal Movement, and the Eastern Question*, 278-79, 305; Karpat, "The Transformation," 278-279.

5 Frederick Stanley Rodkey, "Lord Palmerston and the Rejuvenation of Turkey, 1830-41: Part II, 1839-41", *Journal of Modern History*, 2 (June 1930): 199.

6 Harold Temperley, "British Policy Towards Parliamentary Rule and Constitutionalism in Turkey (1830- 1914)", *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 4 (1933): 156-57.

system, Turkey would, within only a few years, embark upon a path of steady advancement—putting an end, as he put it, to the widespread claims that the empire was decaying and on the verge of collapse.⁷ This approach was swiftly translated into action. In 1839, the Ottoman statesman Reşid Pasha spent several months in Britain, where he held extensive discussions with Palmerston. By the time he departed London, Reşid had formulated an ambitious program of reforms shaped by the principles advocated by his British counterparts. When the Sultan later enacted these measures—collectively known as the Tanzimat—Palmerston sent his compliments, praising the initiative as one “laden with immeasurable benefit for the Ottoman Empire.”⁸ When the next major Russian challenge emerged, the Ottomans once again found themselves dependent on direct British support—precisely the outcome the Tanzimat reforms had been intended to avoid. In April 1853, the Czar renewed his demand for the authority to intervene on behalf of Orthodox Christians within the empire, effectively reviving the humiliating provisions of the Treaty of Hunkar İskelesi. Whereas Britain had remained largely inactive in 1833, by 1853 Palmerston—now serving as Home Secretary—advocated a far more assertive response. Pressing the wavering Aberdeen ministry, he urged armed resistance to Russia’s claims. Consequently, Britain entered into alliance with the Ottoman Empire and France, leading to the Crimean War of 1854–1856.⁹ However, Britain’s robust involvement in the Crimean conflict had limited impact on the progress of Ottoman reforms. In the war’s aftermath, Lord Stratford de Redcliffe—the veteran British ambassador in Constantinople and cousin of George Canning—observed that European powers were growing increasingly frustrated with the Ottomans’ inadequate implementation of the Tanzimat measures. In a private meeting with the Sultan, he warned that a sense of disappointment—and, at times, near despair—was spreading across Europe. Evidence of this sentiment, he explained, could be seen not only in the comments of private citizens and prominent public figures but also in the continental press, especially in France, and, more recently, to some degree in Britain’s leading newspapers.¹⁰

Shortly after his audience with the Sultan, Lord Stratford remarked that it would be hard to identify any statesman—or, indeed, any thoughtful observer—who did not recognize in the persistent weakness of the Ottoman Empire the looming risk of a major European conflict over its division.¹¹ Lord Stratford’s perspective exemplifies the dual nature of mid-Victorian

7 Rodkey, “Lord Palmerston,” 202.

8 Rodkey, “Lord Palmerston,” 205.

9 Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Life of the Right Honourable Stratford Canning, Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe: From His Memoirs and Private and Official Papers* (New York: Ams Press, 1976), 249; *The Annual Register*, LXXV (London, 1853), 210.

10 Foreign Office, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, David Gillard, ed. (Frederick, Md., 1984), “Series B” 1:18.

11 Foreign Office, *British Documents*, 1:19.

Conservative Britain's Near Eastern policy. Reports on Ottoman society often clashed with Victorian moral sensibilities, yet the possibility of a large-scale war among the Great Powers rendered support for the Ottomans a reluctant necessity. While British policymakers accepted this stance, the general public did not share the same obligation. Following the zenith of the Crimean War and during Lord Palmerston's leadership, the Ottoman Empire's reputation in Britain steadily deteriorated. Although the Tanzimat reforms made little progress during the 1860s, the British public occasionally reacted with indignation to Ottoman repression of non-Muslims. When Ottoman forces suppressed a revolt in Crete, *The Times* urged the empire to relinquish control of the island, and in the House of Lords, the Duke of Argyll publicly criticized the Foreign Office's pro-Ottoman position in the conflict. Privately, the British government shared this sentiment. The Earl of Clarendon, who served as Foreign Secretary from 1865 to 1866, remarked to the British ambassador in Constantinople that "the only way to improve [the Turks] is to improve them off the face of the earth."¹²

Publicly, however, Lord Stanley's Conservative government, under the Earl of Derby, refrained from provoking the Ottoman authorities. In the Queen's Speech opening the first parliamentary session of 1867—delivered by Benjamin Disraeli in his role as Chancellor of the Exchequer—the need to "bring about improved relations between the Porte and its Christian subjects" was acknowledged in a measured tone. The address emphasized, nonetheless, that such reforms should remain "not inconsistent with the sovereign rights of the Sultan."¹³ This period marked the beginning of an era in which Britain's policy toward the Ottoman Empire became a significant source of political contention between the Liberal and Conservative parties. Liberals, drawing on their evangelical base, consistently criticized the government's passive response to reports of persecution against non-Muslim Ottoman subjects. In contrast, Conservative officials routinely resisted calls for intervention in Ottoman affairs. For instance, when a delegation of Ottoman Jews petitioned the British consulate in Bucharest for protection from Ottoman troops, Lord Stanley responded that it would contravene "policy and practice" to extend British protection to Jews who were "not subjects of Her Majesty."¹⁴ Over time, the British public grew increasingly impatient with the slow pace of Ottoman reform. This sentiment was reflected by the editors of *The Times*, who addressed the Ottoman authorities in early 1876, stating that while the empire's laws were "intrinsically good," they were generally poorly enforced. They criticized the neglect of poorer subjects—both Muslim and Christian—who were lightly taxed yet persecuted when unable to meet obligations,

12 Temperley, "British Policy," 165-66; Richard T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876* (Connecticut: The Harvester Press, 1975), 18.

13 *The Annual Register*, LXXXIX (1867), 3.

14 Foreign Office, *British Documents*, 2:375; Hansard (1867), cc. 746, 1001.

attributing these failings to the insolvency of the Ottoman Treasury and the government's neglect of its people's needs.¹⁵

2. Administrative and Structural Challenges in Ottoman Crete

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Cretan Question emerged as one of the most significant international challenges confronting the Ottoman Empire. Several European commentators drew parallels between developments in Crete and the Armenian Question, underlining the structural difficulties both issues created for the Empire's multiethnic composition and centralized governance. Within this framework, the Ottoman administration increasingly became the center of friction with the island's Christian population, while Greece's aspirations for Crete and its support for local uprisings in pursuit of these ambitions gained international attention. Although the Cretan Question did not immediately threaten the Empire's survival, its strategic location and exposure to foreign interference transformed it into a problem with potentially serious political and economic repercussions. The island's geographical conditions and diverse population made it a persistently difficult region to administer, as the Christian communities concentrated in mountainous areas continuously challenged Ottoman authority. Compounding this, the logistical and financial shortcomings of the Ottoman military further undermined the state's control. Meanwhile, Greece's persistent claims on Crete demonstrated that the issue carried the potential to evolve into a protracted crisis, affecting not only Ottoman-Greek relations but also the broader stability of the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁶ The new regulations introduced in Crete, instead of easing tensions, generated a number of structural difficulties on the island. Amid the clashes, much of the Muslim population sought refuge in fortified castles for fear of their security, and many were unable to return to their homes and properties for an extended period. The extensive devastation of Muslim settlements rendered the resettlement process both economically and logistically burdensome. A particularly acute challenge arose in the procurement of timber, a key material for reconstruction efforts. To address these shortages, the Ottoman government opened loan negotiations with the Public Debt Administration and several international banks, offering customs revenues as collateral. Yet, these attempts produced no tangible outcome. A partial resolution was eventually achieved through the intervention of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Hanotaux, who facilitated a loan of one hundred thousand Ottoman liras from the French-Dutch Bank, thereby enabling the partial financing of reconstruction activities.¹⁷

15 *The Times*, 13 January 1876, 8.

16 İbrahim Hamaloğlu, *An Island in the Shadow of Great Powers the Cretan Question in British and Ottoman Public Opinion (1897- 1913)*, (Konya: Eğitim Press, 2025), 81-82; *St James's Gazette*, 26 May 1896, 3; *Daily News (London)*, 27 May 1896, 5; *Leeds Mercury*, 27 May 1896, 8.

17 *Leeds Mercury*, 5 October 1896, 7; *London Evening Standard*, 8 October 1896, 5; *Liverpool*

One of the major issues encountered in the course of implementing the new regulations was the organization and restructuring of the gendarmerie intended to secure order in Crete. To address this matter, a commission composed of representatives from both the Ottoman Empire and the Great Powers convened on January 3, 1897. During the discussions, the Great Powers insisted on the inclusion of foreign nationals in the gendarmerie ranks. The Ottoman delegates, however, firmly opposed this proposal, maintaining that the units should consist solely of Ottoman subjects—namely Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs. They further stressed that neither the Treaty of Halepa nor subsequent reforms contained any clause permitting foreigners to serve in the gendarmerie. In response, the representatives of the Great Powers escalated the pressure, warning that if their demands were refused, they would either withdraw from the commission or unilaterally establish the gendarmerie themselves. Confronted with this diplomatic challenge, the Ottoman government categorically rejected the idea of limiting the force to Greek nationals alone, yet on January 16, 1897, it sought to ease tensions temporarily by consenting to appoint a foreign commander and several officers to the gendarmerie. Consequently, the dispute over the structure of the gendarmerie organization was settled through a partial compromise that reflected the demands of the great powers.¹⁸ The rise of mass politics in Europe, expressed through the emergence of the “new nationalisms” of the late nineteenth century, was deeply shaped by broad technological transformations.

3. Rise of Mass Journalism and Public Opinion in Late 19th-Century Europe

As the innovations of the Second Industrial Revolution (c. 1865–1914) became increasingly widespread, growing economic prosperity expanded disposable income among larger segments of European society, facilitating the development of mass-media consumption cultures. The commercialization of news—now packaged as both entertainment and a means of political participation, especially for the expanding middle classes—profoundly reshaped the character and circulation of public knowledge.¹⁹ The same economic developments that supported the rise of a mass bourgeois

Daily Post, 31 October 1896, 6; *Western Times*, 31 October 1896, 4; *Morning Post*, 10 November 1896, 3; *London Evening Standard*, 21 November 1896, 5; *St James's Gazette*, 21 November 1896, 14; *Nantwich Guardian*, 24 November 1896, 3; *Londonderry Sentinel*, 28 November 1896, 3.

18 *Voice of St. Lucia*, 3 September 1896, 2; *Western Daily Press*, 26 December 1896, 5; *Leicester Daily Post*, 26 December 1896, 4.

19 Timothy Baycroft, “The New Nationalism,” *The Fin-de-Siècle World*, ed. Michael Saler (London; New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 326; Timothy Baycroft, “France: Ethnicity and Revolutionary Tradition,” *What Is a Nation? Europe 1789-1914*, eds. Mark Hewitson and Timothy Baycroft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 28–41.

society also accelerated the invention and refinement of new technologies that made possible the inexpensive, disposable newsprint characteristic of fin-de-siècle popular print culture. Improvements in communication, printing, and transportation infrastructure allowed mass media to operate for the first time on a genuinely broad public scale. Printing technology, in particular, underwent swift and cumulative progress, as essential materials and production techniques became increasingly affordable due to expanding international trade and more efficient manufacturing methods.²⁰ These technological advances made it possible to produce popular periodicals in quantities and at costs unimaginable with earlier generations' technical capabilities. Increased printing speeds also meant that publication deadlines could be pushed back significantly, allowing editors to incorporate far more current material into the final editions. This development proved crucial: as telegraph networks expanded during the 1870s and 1880s, international news could be transmitted within hours or days rather than weeks, fostering more timely and detailed public engagement with global affairs. The rise of international news agencies—such as Reuters and Havas—and the establishment of a global regulatory framework through the International Telegraph Union (ITU) in 1865 further enhanced the accessibility and circulation of foreign news across European markets.²¹ The reduction in printing costs likewise broadened the range of subjects that could be addressed in print, facilitating the rise of regular, specialized columns on international affairs and enabling readers to follow global events in real time. As a result, the public could engage more actively in shaping discussions of foreign policy, rather than merely responding to decisions already made. Improvements in newsprint production were further reinforced by the expanded transportation infrastructure of the late nineteenth century, which allowed newspapers to circulate more widely and efficiently. This not only increased the reach of national media but also helped create a shared, nationwide reading experience that transcended regional and social boundaries.²²

The erosion of physical barriers to the circulation of information profoundly reshaped the dynamics of foreign policymaking. Whereas European foreign ministries had long maintained near-exclusive control over up-to-date accounts of international events, an increasingly informed—and increasingly vocal—news-reading public now entered the arena of debate on

20 Maria Adamowicz-Hariasz, "From Opinion to Information: The Roman-Feuillton and the Transformation of the Nineteenth-Century French Press," *Making the News: Modernity & the Mass Press in Nineteenth-Century France*, eds. Dean De la Motte and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 161.

21 Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s-1914: Speed in the Age of Transatlantic Journalism*, 70; Terhi Rantanen, "The Globalization of Electronic News in the 19th Century", *Media, Culture & Society* 19, 4, (1 October, 1997): 605–20.

22 Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900* (Open Book Publishers, 2018), 183.

global affairs. These transformations also redefined how “news” itself was conceived and produced. The inherently non-durable nature of newspapers—both in form and content—signaled a fundamental shift in European regimes of public knowledge: the fleeting, rapidly updated periodical became a medium ideally suited to the immediacy and present-minded political culture of the new mass societies of the fin-de-siècle.²³ The expansion of journalistic themes—especially the increased attention to international affairs—significantly broadened the horizons of public opinion. By supplying ordinary readers with more detailed information about distant and previously unfamiliar events, the press enabled individuals to situate themselves within a wider, better-informed national community and to shape their own sense of identity accordingly.²⁴

Periodicals with wide readerships often positioned themselves as the authentic voices of the national public, claiming to articulate—and to act in the interests of—the nation as a whole in order to enhance their authority and credibility. Between 1871 and 1891, the number of British newspapers that labeled themselves as “national” rose from just one to thirty-three, while many titles embraced names that reflected the New Journalism ideal of advancing public understanding (e.g., *the Mirror*, *the Mercury*, *the Spectator*). These assertions were not without effect: governments acknowledged the influence of the press—sometimes reluctantly—by establishing press bureaus responsible for engaging with domestic and foreign newspapers as indicators of public sentiment, consulting them to assess prevailing opinion on key policy issues. Tellingly, in a 1901 letter, British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury complained that “the diplomacy of nations is now conducted as much in the letters of foreign correspondents as in the despatches of the Foreign Office,” revealing the extent to which newspapers had become perceived as major channels of public opinion, encroaching on the traditional monopoly that political elites once held over national policymaking.²⁵ The perspectives conveyed in fin-de-siècle news media constituted an early variant of “public diplomacy,” in which the articulation of public opinion was no longer confined to the realm of state policy. The so-called revolution in public opinion expanded the boundaries of diplomatic practice, as foreign policy increasingly had to engage with worldviews and national priorities shaped by popular discourse. Newspapers could, with some justification, claim to articulate the interests, values, and attitudes of their readerships, thereby challenging the authority of traditional political elites within the diffuse sovereignties generated by

23 Terhi Rantanen, “The Globalization”, 609.

24 Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 34.

25 Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 105; Martin Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture*. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2002), 10; James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 50.

the spread of popular nationalisms across Europe. The growing political weight attributed to this expanding sphere of public opinion enhanced the prominence of mass-circulation newspapers within the late-nineteenth century “political-press nexus,” where the style and conduct of high politics adapted to accommodate the press in order to amplify political influence. However, the role of newspapers as engines of popular discourse should not be exaggerated. Late-nineteenth-century papers typically reinforced the assumptions of an existing readership rather than attempting to convert new audiences. This suggests that newspapers did not single-handedly construct public discourse but rather functioned as one component within a wider ecosystem of opinion formation.²⁶

4. British Press Representations of the Cretan Revolt (1896–1898)

British journalistic coverage of the 1897–98 Cretan revolt was firmly grounded in a longstanding middle-class tradition of philhellenism, Christian internationalism, and liberal humanitarianism, alongside the emerging popular ethos of nationalism in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. This evolution in popular perspectives fostered sympathy for European ethnic groups seeking self-determination and nationhood. While a recognizable liberal-conservative divide existed within British newspapers, reporting on the Cretan revolt generally emphasized the suffering of the island’s Christian majority, resonating with broader British understandings of both the Cretan and the Eastern Questions. Conservative-leaning publications often adopted cautious stances in the early months of the crisis, highlighting the risk that intercommunal violence might destabilize Europe by hastening the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Reflecting on the potential impact of the revolt on Britain’s international position, an *Economist* article from March 1897 noted that, although sentimental obligations toward Greece carried some weight, any withdrawal from the Concert would leave Britain isolated without producing tangible benefits.²⁷ This cautious editorial stance reflected a desire to preserve the Ottoman Empire as a counterweight to the territorial ambitions of the continental European powers within a Concert system designed to sustain a stable European order—a perspective likely shared by *The Economist*’s elite readership. Yet this prudence encountered widespread popular sympathy for Crete’s Christian population, which dominated newspaper coverage of the revolt. The development of New Journalism practices within the British press, together with the popularization of liberal and nationalist sentiment, framed the uprising as a matter of urgent public concern. The aims of the Cretan insurgents were presented with little ambiguity in British newspapers,

26 Simon J. Potter, “Jingoism, Public Opinion, And The New Imperialism”, *Media History* 20, 1 (2 January, 2014): 38; Alan J. Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press in England, 1855-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 188.

27 *The Economist*, 20 March 1897, 410.

which consistently emphasized that only full union with Greece would satisfy the island's Christian majority. As *The Times* reported in May 1897, "The absolute decision of the Greek Government to persist in the occupation and protection of Crete is founded upon the declaration of the Cretan people that they are prepared to shed the last drop of their blood for the accomplishment of their national aspiration, which cannot be satisfied with anything short of complete union with Greece." This portrayal of a unified Cretan commitment to enosis was echoed across British coverage, often oversimplifying the diversity of objectives among insurgent factions. While advocates of union with Greece were the most vocal, many insurgents sought broader reforms and greater political autonomy rather than outright separation from the Ottoman Empire. The resulting narrative—a straightforward struggle for national self-determination against foreign oppression—resonated with British middle-class preferences for a reorganized European order composed of clearly defined nation-states, in contrast to the complex, multi-ethnic Ottoman polity.²⁸

This straightforward narrative of a national struggle for self-determination against foreign oppression mirrored the British middle classes' preference for a reorganized European order composed of distinct nation-states, rather than the archaic, multi-ethnic polities represented by the Ottoman Empire. However, while such ideals were readily applied to critiques of foreign domination, they were seldom extended to Britain's own multi-ethnic empire, revealing the limits of liberal moralism in the public sphere. As British newspapers idealized the causes of the revolt, the crisis itself became a matter of direct public interest, seen as an opportunity to assert the primacy of the nation-state as the essential unit of a modern, twentieth-century international order. In British news discourse, the Cretan revolt was thus portrayed as a clear example of humanity's natural inclination to organize politically along national lines, in opposition to the conservative framework of the Concert of Europe. Leading liberal outlets such as the *Manchester Guardian* articulated this opposition, approvingly reporting on a speech by Member of Parliament Henry Fowler that framed the Cretan struggle as emblematic of a new liberal international order grounded in national self-governance rather than ancient imperial prerogatives. From this perspective, the Concert of Europe was criticized as an outdated and artificial structure that maintained the subjugation of a Christian-majority population under the authority of an allegedly foreign minority. An article in the *Illustrated London*

28 David Steele, "Three British Prime Ministers and the Survival of the Ottoman Empire, 1855–1902", *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, 1 (2 January 2014): 48; *The Times*, 17 February 1897, 7; Pınar Şenışık, "Rethinking Muslim and Christian Communities in Late Nineteenth Century Ottoman Crete", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 28, 1, (2010): 38; Şenışık, Pınar, *The Transformation of Ottoman Crete: Revolts, Politics and Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 113–117.

News covering the Greek intervention on Crete explicitly conveyed British liberal disdain for the Concert and elite political hierarchies, noting: “But as everybody can see that, without the spirited action of Greece, the precious diplomatists of the ‘Concert of Europe’ would have gone on twirling their thumbs round the civil war in Crete, for which their own bungling is directly responsible.”²⁹

A cartoon published in *Punch*, a leading illustrated periodical, succinctly conveyed the perceived failings of the Great Powers’ traditional approach to the Cretan Question. Titled “*Tender Mercies!*”, the illustration depicted an unwilling child, representing Crete, being handed over to a thuggish, heavily armed figure symbolizing the Ottoman Empire by a crowned figure labeled “Europa,” who appeared indifferent to the cries of the sobbing youth. Incorporating a derogatory quotation from Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, which exemplified the conventional conservative stance of Concert diplomacy, the cartoon’s target of criticism was unmistakable. Lord Salisbury was reported in the House of Commons as asserting that, in his view—and he believed this reflected the consensus of the other Powers—it would be “rash to act at once [to] withdraw the Turkish troops, who are really the only safeguard against disorder.” Across a series of illustrations on the revolt throughout 1897, *Punch*’s depiction of the Concert embodied public opinion discourses that viewed genuine expressions of national self-determination as impossible within an international system that artificially enabled and perpetuated Ottoman authority over Christian populations. From May 1897 onward, however, *Punch*’s representation of the Concert shifted. Following the Austro-German withdrawal from the International Squadron, the figure of Europa transformed from a middle-aged woman past her prime into a young, armored maiden reminiscent of Joan of Arc, confronting Ottoman atrocities in Crete. This evolution in *Punch*’s imagery mirrored broader changes in British popular discourse, which increasingly criticized a universal international framework that prioritized cooperative conciliation among powers over the pursuit of national interests, favoring instead exclusive, interest-driven alliances. As Berlin and Vienna withdrew from the International Squadron due to growing ties between Constantinople and the former, the intervention of the remaining powers in Crete came to be viewed more positively, seen as a means to remove Ottoman presence from the island in alignment with the outcomes advocated by British popular press coverage.³⁰ British coverage of the Cretan revolt consistently emphasized poor Ottoman governance, reflecting popular Orientalist perceptions that had been reinforced by extensive reporting on the Armenians in 1895. Such

29 *The Manchester Guardian*, 23 April 1897, 7; *The Illustrated London News*, 20 February 1897, 3.

30 UK Parliament Hansard Commons: *Commons Chamber Adjournment Of The House (Easter) Crete*, 48, 12 April 1897; *Punch*, 13 March 1897, 10; *Punch*, 20 March 1897, 139; *Punch*, 1 May 1897, 7.

coverage shaped public understanding of both the causes of the revolt and its potential resolutions. British public opinion largely focused on the Ottoman authorities' reluctance to implement the Thirteen Points reform package, which had been agreed to by Sultan Abdulhamid II in August 1896 to grant greater self-governance to Crete. This pattern of Ottoman lawlessness was frequently contrasted with European ideals of enlightened self-governance, as embodied in Cretan aspirations for autonomy or union with Greece (enosis). Consequently, blame for the outbreak of violence was often attributed to the island's Muslim population. For example, *The Liverpool Mercury* argued that "the Mussulmans are endeavoring to excite the Christians to violence in order to prevent the introduction of the promised reforms." Such portrayals framed the Cretan Turks not merely as interlopers, but as active opponents of self-governance as envisioned by the reform program, as well as deliberately seeking to preserve unjust privileges. The suppression of self-determination—a principle championed by liberal civil society organizations emerging across late-nineteenth-century England, including Cretan Leagues—was presented as an affront to modern British values. In contrast, the cause of Greek national unity under the *Megali Idea* received widespread support within British liberal-nationalist discourse, which drew upon the legacy of prominent philhellenes such as Lord Byron and the classical "great tradition" that positioned Greece (and by extension Crete) as the civilizational cradle of Europe. The Cretan revolt was thus depicted not only as a contemporary struggle between Eastern despotism and Western enlightened governance, but also as a symbolic continuation of Europe's ancient history, as celebrated in the works of Homer and Thucydides.³¹

Previously, such popular humanitarian sentiments were chiefly manifested through charitable relief initiatives rather than through direct political advocacy. Indeed, these philanthropic efforts often ran parallel to more explicit attempts to influence Britain's international policy toward the Ottoman Empire, as reflected in the numerous newspaper reports documenting the civil relief work carried out by British-supported organizations in both Greece and Crete.³² Nevertheless, the pointed criticism of perceived deficiencies in British foreign policy—particularly the alleged leniency toward Ottoman atrocities—within newspaper coverage contributed to a hardening of public opinion. The national government was censured for failing to align its policies with the interests and values of the British populace. Popular periodicals served as a platform for exerting political pressure, as reports of Ottoman-perpetrated acts—sometimes corroborated, but frequently based on unverified secondhand accounts due to the limited mobility of foreign correspondents

31 *The Manchester Guardian*, 9 March 1897, 7; *Liverpool Mercury*, 6 January 1897, 5; Niko Rohé, "European Medical Experts in Wars of 'Others': The Greco-Turkish War of 1897", *European Review of History* 26, 2, (April 2019): 165.

32 *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 February 1897, 7; *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 June 1898, 12.

confined mostly to the secure northern ports of Crete—galvanized public outcry against continued Ottoman control of the island amidst anti-Christian violence. A popular British philhellene refrain captured this deep-seated opposition to the nineteenth-century diplomatic status quo: “*The Concert... the Concert be hanged! The powers ring of harpies round a sick jackal. Crete must be free, Crete must be free.*”³³

The widespread criticism of conventional British foreign policy, coupled with the expression of public opinion through popular media, constrained Lord Salisbury’s cabinet from adhering to its preferred traditional approach to the Cretan Question—that is, the continued support of Ottoman administration. The intense pressure articulated in the pages of widely read periodicals made it increasingly difficult for the government to pursue its customary stance.³⁴ While newspapers exerted significant influence over British public opinion, their authority was not absolute. In shaping—or conditioning—public knowledge, popular news media were constrained by what resonated with prevailing public discourse, which in turn limited the scope of reporting from Crete. Editorial decisions were further guided by discourse-informed perceptions of the Eastern Question. Reports of Christian-perpetrated violence against Muslims, for instance, were unlikely to align with the broadly philhellenic sympathies of British readers, and consequently many newspapers either downplayed or questioned the accuracy of such accounts. An *Illustrated London News* article covering events leading up to the revolt reported that “The wholesale firing of Cretan [Christian] villages by Turkish troops in revenge for ravages of the Christians who had been goaded into insurrection has left a large population homeless and starving,” thereby minimizing the responsibility of Christian insurgents while reinforcing popular perceptions of Muslim governance as harsh and vindictive.³⁵

When reporting on a later alleged event of Christians at Canea, the *Manchester Guardian* described how a Christian Cretan family was slaughtered by locals, along with those who tried to intervene, while the city’s Turkish garrison. In contrast, regarding the Sitia massacres earlier in the crisis, where roughly 800 Cretan Turks were killed by Christian insurgents, *The Times* quickly dismissed reports of Christian violence against Muslim noncombatants, asserting that “no massacre whatsoever has taken place” in the eastern region, despite local claims to the contrary.³⁶ British news coverage of the Cretan crisis predominantly emphasized atrocities committed by Cretan Muslims or Ottoman forces against Christian inhabitants, while reports of violence against Muslims were often downplayed, frequently framed as

33 Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011): 225-226.

34 Thomas G. Otte, “A Question of Leadership: Lord Salisbury, the Unionist Cabinet and Foreign Policy Making, 1895–1900”, *Contemporary British History* 14, 4, (1 December 2000): 4.

35 *The Illustrated London News*, 4 July 1896, 3.

36 *The Times*, 25 February 1897, 5; *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 May 1896, 5.

reactions provoked by Turkish actions. This form of outrage journalism resonated strongly with British audiences, presenting a high-level international crisis in starkly human terms and facilitating the creation of straightforward public opinion narratives about a politically complex situation. Among these events, the Candia riot of September 6, 1898, received the most extensive press attention, provoking widespread national indignation. The riot, sparked by the British decision to reinstate market-day taxation amidst overcrowded trading conditions caused by displaced Muslim refugees from the island's interior, resulted in the deaths of approximately 500 Christian residents, fourteen British servicemen, and a British vice-consul and his family.³⁷

The British national press seized upon the Candia massacre, portraying the Muslim-on-Christian violence as a microcosm of the broader revolt and using it to justify the removal of Crete from direct Ottoman control. The apparent unwillingness of Ottoman troops stationed in Candia to quell the rioting was taken as evidence of the empire's inability to provide basic security; one *Illustrated London News* (ILN) column even suggested that the violence had been instigated by disaffected Turkish soldiers and was only suppressed following the bombardment by HMS *Hazard*. Coverage of the subsequent legal proceedings reflected similar conceptions of European order. The British-organized trials of Muslims accused in the riot were presented as a demonstration, in the eyes of the British public, of the lawlessness of Oriental actors contrasted with the fairness and governance embodied by British peacekeepers. An ILN illustration of the courtroom depicted the impeccably dressed and upright European military jurists in stark contrast to the disheveled, barefoot defendants wearing fezzes and loose-fitting sirwal (*şalvar*), visually embodying the clash between European and Oriental values as imagined by British popular culture. The imposition of European justice through the sentencing of those found guilty of inciting the riot was thus framed in civilizational terms, appealing to British sensibilities and shaping public perceptions of the powers' intervention as an enlightened, imperialist effort to impose order on the unruly peripheries of Europe.³⁸ The Candia revolt acted as a catalyst in shaping public opinion, ultimately contributing to the final removal of Ottoman authority from the island, as it resonated strongly with the values promoted by popular journalism. The British public's outrage—provoked not only by the massacre of Christian civilians but also by the deaths of British servicemen and diplomatic personnel—targeted both the Cretan Turks and the residual Ottoman presence. The stark contrast between

37 Robert Holland, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and the Concert of Europe: The Case of the High Commissionership of Prince George of Greece in Crete, 1898-1906", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 17, 2 (1 October 1999): 257; Ayşe Nükhet Adıyeke and Nuri Adıyeke, *Osmanlı Dönemi Kısa Girit Tarihi* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2021), 222-223.

38 *The Illustrated London News*, 17 September 1898, 3; *The Illustrated London News*, 5 November 1898, 14.

the orderly, European-style justice administered in the British-convened military trials and the chaotic governance of the Sultan was interpreted as justifying the elimination of Ottoman sovereignty on humanitarian grounds. These motivations were driven by public sentiment and moral outrage rather than the calculated, strategic considerations that had historically guided coordinated European diplomatic interventions.³⁹

British reporting on the Cretan revolt not only criticized Ottoman actions and obstinacy toward the island's Christian population but also leveraged the crisis to censure Britain's international rivals—particularly Germany—for their perceived reluctance to alleviate the suffering of Cretan Christians or to cooperate effectively with the other Great Powers via the International Squadron in pursuing a collective, Concert-style resolution. A *Times* article at the onset of the revolt condemned Germany's inaction, observing that the German nation “does not exhibit the slightest interest” in Crete's fate, and arguing that even if a Reichstag vote were conceivable, it was highly unlikely that any significant political faction would advocate for active intervention, whether in coercion of Greece or in support of her aspirations, with or without the coordination of Europe.⁴⁰ This article placed responsibility for Germany's inaction not only on the country's policymaking elites but extended it to a perceived moral deficiency of the German nation as a whole. *The Times* later echoed this sentiment, suggesting that German hostility toward Britain—and the stability of the European status quo—was evident not only in official policies emerging from Wilhelmplatz but also in the German national press, which was seen to have “readily availed itself” to an uncooperative stance regarding Crete. The *Illustrated London News* took an even more forthright position, criticizing Germany and Austria-Hungary for failing to challenge Ottoman despotism on the island, lamenting that the two nations “should decide to stand apart and be mere spectators of another great blow struck at Turkish misrule in which they forgo the glory of taking a part.” This coverage underscored both the injustice of Teutonic inaction and the legitimacy of British leadership in the international intervention. While the Concert of Europe retained some recognition in British public discourse as a framework for foreign policy, these conceptions were narrow, reflecting an exclusive alliance of like-minded states with aligned interests rather than a truly universal system for preventing European conflict. Germany's failure to oppose Ottoman oppression of the Greek national cause—seen as emblematic of the contemporary values of national self-determination—further reinforced British popular demonization of the Wilhelmine Empire, which was already criticized for threatening European stability through its aggressive Weltpolitik and expansive naval ambitions.⁴¹ The German nation

39 *The Times*, 2 April 1897, 5.

40 *The Times*, 1 January 1897, 3; *The Times*, 2 April 1897, 5.

41 John Lowe, *The Great Powers, Imperialism, and the German Problem, 1865-1925*, (London;

as a whole was thus perceived as neglecting its obligations as a member of the European community, prioritizing national interests over shared cultural heritage, and thereby demonstrating a moral inadequacy to fulfill the responsibilities expected of a great power. Media coverage of the Cretan revolt highlighted this erosion of consensus regarding a Europe defined by common cultural traits and political interests, revealing the weakening of transnational ties on the continent and the concomitant ascendancy of the nation-state as the primary locus of identity. While a sense of European identity remained a significant component of British political culture, popular perceptions of ‘Europe’ became increasingly constrained by a vision shaped by British understandings of continental history and culture. The rise of nationally-informed discourses grounded in popular nationalism signaled the decline of the Concert of Europe, whose principles were increasingly regarded as relics of an elitist past when international relations—and broader conceptions of political legitimacy—were determined by a narrow privileged class, in stark contrast to the emergent mass political cultures of the continent in the years leading up to the First World War.⁴²

5. The 1896–97 Cretan Insurrections and the Ottoman–Greek War

Despite all diplomatic and administrative measures, the Cretan Greeks once again rose in revolt in 1896, seeking the island’s union with Greece. During the upheaval, many Muslims were killed or wounded, and the widespread violence forced a large portion of the Muslim population to flee Crete. The rebellion profoundly affected not only the island’s social fabric but also the international diplomatic balance. During this period, the major European powers—particularly Britain, France, Russia, and Italy—exerted strong diplomatic pressure in favor of Crete’s annexation to Greece. As a result of these efforts, Prince George, the son of the Greek king, was appointed as the island’s governor. His appointment clearly demonstrates that the Cretan Greeks, with the backing of the great powers, achieved significant political gains. The 1896 uprising directly paved the way for the 1897 Ottoman–Greek War, commonly known as the “War of ’97.” Although the main battles took place outside Crete, the conflict’s root cause lay in the Cretan question itself. During the war, the Ottoman army gained a clear military advantage over the Greek forces, and even the fall of Athens appeared imminent. However, European intervention halted the Ottoman advance. Consequently, despite its military success, the Ottoman Empire lost its political leverage through the postwar diplomatic settlements, revealing the gap between victory on

Routledge, 1994), 141.

42 Paul Stock, “Towards a Language of ‘Europe’: History, Rhetoric, Community”, *The European Legacy* 22, 6 (18 August 2017): 653.

the battlefield and recognition in the international arena.⁴³ Although the Ottoman Empire achieved a military victory in the 1897 Ottoman-Greek War, the diplomatic outcomes that followed were widely regarded as a political setback. One of the clearest manifestations of this situation came when the ambassadors of the great powers in Istanbul officially demanded that the Ottoman government recall Sadeddin Pasha—who had been dispatched to Crete as a special representative—within forty-eight hours. The ambassadors' request appears to have stemmed from the belief that Sadeddin Pasha was encroaching upon the authority of the island's military governor, Beroviç Pasha, and constraining his administrative actions. Meanwhile, the foreign delegates serving on the Judicial Commission in Crete were instructed to proceed with judicial reforms independently, without consulting the Ottoman representative, Nazım Bey, on the grounds that his appointment had not yet been formally recognized by the embassies. These developments clearly indicate that the Ottoman Empire had lost significant influence over the administrative and judicial reform processes in Crete, while the great powers had expanded their capacity for direct intervention on the island.⁴⁴ In response to these developments, the Ottoman government proposed that Beroviç Pasha, who held de facto military authority in Crete, be granted the right to appoint either Sadeddin Pasha or İbrahim Pasha as his deputy. The intention behind this proposal was to prevent administrative conflicts on the island and to promote institutional coherence. However, the great powers rejected the plan, deeming it inappropriate, as they sought to avoid any challenge to Beroviç Pasha's authority or position. Subsequently, the Ottoman government decided to recall Konstantin Efendi, another prominent official serving on the island. This decision illustrates that the Ottoman Empire's margin for maneuver in the face of international pressure on its administrative personnel in Crete was steadily shrinking, and that it was attempting to reorganize and reassert its control over the island's governance.⁴⁵

43 *Evening News (London)*, 6 June 1896, 3; *Lyttelton Times*, 17 July 1896, 5; *Shields Daily Gazette*, 1 August 1896, 3; *London Daily Chronicle*, 6 February 1897, 6; *Cork Daily Herald*, 15 February 1897, 5; *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 1 March 1897, 3; *Dundee Courier*, 19 April 1897, 4; *Coleraine Chronicle*, 24 April 1897, 4; *American Register*, 24 April 1897, 1; *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 3 May 1897, 8; *Freeman's Journal*, 21 May 1897, 5.

44 Cihan Özgün, "Osmanlı'nın Bitmeyen Sancısı Girit Problemi ve Dış Politika," *Tanzimat'ın Günümüze Olaylar ve Kişiler Ekseninde Türk Hariciyesi*, eds. İrşad Sami Yuca and Hidayet Kara, (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2019), 30; *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 December 1896, 2; *London Evening Standard*, 14 December 1896, 7; *Northern Guardian (Hartlepool)*, 14 December 1896, 3.

45 *London Evening Standard*, 16 December 1896, 5; *Daily News (London)*, 24 April 1897, 3; *London Daily Chronicle*, 10 July 1897, 8.

Conclusion

The Cretan revolt of 1897–98 provides a revealing lens through which to examine the entanglement of journalism, public opinion, and international politics in late Victorian Britain. The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that British newspapers did far more than chronicle events on a distant Ottoman island: they actively shaped the interpretive frameworks through which the revolt was understood, transforming a complex provincial conflict into a moralized narrative of civilizational struggle. By mobilizing long-standing philhellenic sympathies, Orientalist assumptions, and Christian humanitarian vocabularies, the press recast the insurgents as legitimate agents of national self-determination while portraying Ottoman administrators and Muslim Cretans as embodiments of disorder and violence. This representational asymmetry not only simplified the conflict for readers but also generated a hierarchy of suffering that positioned Christian victims at the center of humanitarian concern. The British press's framing of the revolt had implications that extended far beyond public sentiment. By amplifying atrocity narratives—most notably in the aftermath of the Candia massacre—newspapers generated powerful moral pressures that narrowed the space available for diplomatic restraint. Their persistent criticism of Great Power inaction, and particularly of German and Austrian reluctance to challenge Ottoman authority, contributed to growing doubts about the viability of the Concert of Europe as a mechanism of international order. In this sense, British newspapers did not merely reflect popular frustrations; they helped articulate an alternative political imaginary in which national self-determination and moral interventionism appeared increasingly more legitimate than traditional diplomatic conservatism. At the same time, the study shows that representations of the revolt were inseparable from broader transformations in the media ecosystem. The rise of mass-circulation periodicals, the commercial pressures of subscription-based journalism, and the narrative conventions of New Journalism encouraged forms of reporting that privileged sensationalism, immediacy, and personalized accounts of violence. These tendencies magnified the emotional and moral dimensions of the revolt, making it an emblematic crisis through which late nineteenth-century readers negotiated ideas of European identity, civilizational hierarchy, and imperial responsibility.

Taken together, these findings underscore that British newspaper coverage of the Cretan revolt was a formative force in shaping the political and cultural meanings attached to the Eastern Mediterranean at the fin de siècle. The press acted as an intermediary between distant conflict and domestic politics, translating local violence into a language that resonated

with metropolitan anxieties, expectations, and ideological commitments. In doing so, it constrained governmental options, contributed to the erosion of confidence in the Concert system, and helped define the moral vocabulary through which Britain imagined its place in a rapidly changing international order. Ultimately, the Cretan case illustrates a broader shift in nineteenth-century international politics: the growing capacity of mass journalism to contest elite diplomacy, claim authority over the interpretation of global events, and influence both popular and official understandings of empire, sovereignty, and humanitarian obligation. Far from being a peripheral episode, the revolt stands as a significant moment in the history of public diplomacy—one that reveals how newspapers became central actors in the production of international meaning and in the negotiation of Britain's role in the world.

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APPENDIX

Picture 1: *Punch*, 13 March 1897, 127.



Picture 2: *Punch*, 20 March 1897, 139.



Picture 3: *Punch*, 1 May 1897, 211.



Extended Abstract

The Cretan revolt of 1897–98 unfolded at a pivotal moment in European political and media history, when mass journalism, expanding telegraph networks, and the emergence of increasingly self-conscious middle-class readerships fundamentally reshaped how international crises were narrated and understood. Within this rapidly transforming public sphere, the British press played a decisive role in constructing the political meaning of the revolt. Newspapers did not merely transmit information from the eastern Mediterranean; they actively framed, dramatized, and moralized the conflict in ways that resonated with late Victorian ideological sensibilities. As a result, a complex provincial uprising involving competing local interests, imperial governance challenges, and intercommunal violence was reimagined in Britain as a struggle between an oppressed Christian population seeking national liberation and an illegitimate, lawless Ottoman administration clinging to antiquated authority. This article examines how British newspapers framed the Cretan revolt, what interpretive traditions shaped their portrayals, and how these representations influenced both public opinion and Britain’s diplomatic posture. The analysis proceeds from the assumption—supported by scholarship on nineteenth-century media and public diplomacy—that newspapers were not passive observers of geopolitical affairs but institutional actors capable of shaping national sentiment and narrowing the range of politically acceptable governmental responses. Building on this premise, the article explores how philhellenism, Orientalism, Christian humanitarianism, and the emerging logics of popular nationalism informed British press narratives. These intertwined traditions provided journalists with ready-made vocabularies through which the revolt could be interpreted as a moral drama, positioning Cretan insurgents as the rightful agents of European civilization and Ottoman rule as a remnant incompatible with modern political norms. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative discourse-analytical approach grounded in media studies scholarship on framing, outrage journalism, and the political function of the press in fin-de-siècle Europe. The source base consists of a diverse selection of British newspapers, chosen to reflect the full spectrum of editorial orientations and readerships: *The Times* and *The Economist* represent elite political commentary; *The Manchester*

Guardian and *The Liverpool Mercury* reflect liberal and provincial advocacy; and *Punch*, *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, and the *Illustrated London News* embody popular illustrated journalism. Articles were identified through keyword searches related to Crete, the Ottoman Empire, violence, insurgency, and international intervention. To ensure analytical depth, short telegrams and summary notices were excluded in favor of extended reports, opinion pieces, and illustrations that conveyed substantive interpretive framing. Three major findings structure the article's argument. First, the British press relied heavily on established philhellenic and Orientalist tropes when depicting the revolt. Cretan insurgents were frequently cast as heroic bearers of national aspirations, whose pursuit of enosis—union with Greece—was naturalized as both historically justified and morally imperative. Conversely, Ottoman officials and Muslim Cretans were depicted through markers of disorder, fanaticism, and communal aggression. These contrasts drew on long-standing cultural imaginaries that equated Christian identity with civilization and Muslim identity with despotism or backwardness. By reproducing these binaries, newspapers reinforced a narrative in which Greek claims to the island appeared legitimate and Ottoman sovereignty appeared untenable. Second, British newspapers selectively curated accounts of violence, foregrounding Muslim attacks on Christian populations while downplaying, minimizing, or denying Christian-perpetrated violence against Muslim communities. Reports of atrocities committed by Christians were often dismissed as exaggerations, provocations, or fabrications, while comparable acts by Muslims were framed as evidence of inherent Ottoman brutality or administrative failure. The result was a moral hierarchy of suffering in which Christian victims were accorded primacy and Muslim suffering was rendered either invisible or morally inconsequential. The Candia massacre of 1898 exemplified this dynamic: press coverage emphasized the deaths of Christian civilians and British servicemen while using the episode to argue that Ottoman authority was both morally discredited and practically incapable of ensuring basic order. Third, the study shows that the British press played an important role in eroding confidence in the Concert of Europe, the long-standing diplomatic mechanism through which Great Powers sought to maintain continental stability. By portraying Great Power diplomacy as indecisive, morally compromised, or obstructive to the legitimate aspirations of Christian Cretans, newspapers articulated an alternative vision of international order grounded in national self-determination and humanitarian intervention. Press criticism of German and Austrian reluctance to challenge Ottoman authority further fed public anxieties about European solidarity and raised doubts about the continued viability of multilateral diplomacy. Taken together, these findings reveal that British newspaper coverage of the Cretan revolt was not simply reportage but an act of political imagination. Through selective framing, emotional amplification, and reliance on established cultural

narratives, the press transformed a localized imperial crisis into a moralized European concern and exerted meaningful pressure on British policymakers. Newspapers helped shape the moral vocabulary through which officials and publics alike interpreted the revolt, narrowing the scope of governmental discretion and contributing to the wider crisis of legitimacy afflicting the Concert system. Ultimately, the article argues that the Cretan revolt offers a valuable case study for understanding the intersection of media, diplomacy, and international order at the turn of the twentieth century. It highlights how mass journalism—driven by commercial pressures, ideological commitments, and representational conventions—became a central actor in the production of global political meaning. By examining how British newspapers shaped perceptions of violence, legitimacy, and civilizational belonging, the article contributes to broader debates on the history of public opinion, the evolution of humanitarian discourse, and the role of the press in the making of foreign policy. In doing so, it illuminates the ways in which late nineteenth-century media landscapes reconfigured the relationship between empire, identity, and international politics, offering insights with enduring relevance for the study of public diplomacy and conflict representation.