Neither Victim Nor Accomplice: The Kızılbaş as Borderland Actors in the Early Modern Ottoman Realm

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The leaders of the Safaviyya order with its center in Ardabil, a relatively small city in northwestern Iran, put immense efforts into recruiting followers from among Turkoman (and Kurdish) tribesmen in Anatolia beginning in the mid-eighth/fourteenth century. By the second half of the ninth/fifteenth century, as the movement completed its transformation into a Shi'i military-cum-political group under the leadership of Junayd (d. 869/1460) and his son Haydar (d. 893/1488), Safavid efforts consequently evolved from mostly uncoordinated endeavors aiming to gain followers for the order to a series of semiofficial and programmatic policies of recruiting full-fledged adherents to their cause. These adherents were called Kızılbaş, meaning "read head" in Turkish, due to a crimson twelve-gored headpiece that they wore, which signified their devotion to the Twelve Shi'i Imams, as well as to the leaders of the Safavid movement.¹ This new type of loyalty under the Safavid banner often times meant sending money to the Safavid state via its agents, serving as soldiers in the shah's army, and in many cases migrating to the Safavid realm. The relatively small number of Kızılbaş in greater Iran, where most of the population were either nominally Sunni or politically distant from the movement, made Anatolia (and to a lesser extent Iraq and Syria) even more attractive for the Safavid leaders in their attempts to find a loyal base.² The Safavid leaders, continuing

- 1 For a detailed discussion on the gradual crystallization of the Safavid Sufi order into a Shi'i religiopolitical movement under the Safavid banner, see Baltacioğlu-Brammer, *The emergence of the Safavids*; Mazzaoui, *The origins of the Safavids*; Abbasi, *Safevilerin kökenine dair*; Anooshahr, *Turkestan and the rise of Eurasian empires* 56–83; Musalı, *Şeyh İbrahim Safevi döneminde Erdebil Tekkesi*; Pourahmadi-Amlashi and Zeylabpour, *Sheikh Ibrahim Safavi Morshid-e Ghomnam*; Hinz, *Uzun Hasan ve Şeyh Cüneyd*; Sümer, *Safevi devleti'nin kuruluşu*.
- 2 Sultan Ya'qub (d. 896/1490), the ruler of the Aq Qyunlu state, in his letter to Sultan Bayezid II (d. 918/1512) specifically mentions Haydar's brutality against the locals including "nursing babies, women, and elderly" to explain Safavids' unpopularity in Azerbaijan. Feridun Beg, *Münşe'atü's-selâfin* i, 302–304. One should also mention the linguistic connection between the Turkish-speaking Safavid leaders and most of the inhabitants of Anatolia as a reason for this affinity.

with Shah Ismā'īl (r. 907–930/1501–1524) and Shah Tahmāsb (r. 930–984/1524–1576), primarily strengthened their position by addressing certain vulnerabilities and sensibilities of the inhabitants of the region stemming from various sociopolitical and financial grievances, as well as millenarian anxieties,³ by offering a communal identity, a sense of security, and a series of possibilities for advancement. The end result was that by the mid-tenth/sixteenth century, if one is to believe some of the Ottoman, Safavid, and European sources, the Kızılbaş constituted the majority of the population in Anatolia with a heavy presence not only in rural areas but also in urban centers, including Istanbul.⁴

Modern historiography's initial attempts to tackle the Kızılbaş question was, however, inconsistent, if not problematic. At the outset, according to the Turkish historians-cum-politicians of the early twentieth century, whose staunch nationalist agenda shaped the nature of history writing in the first decades of the newly founded Turkish republic, the existence of the Kızılbaş population in the early modern Ottoman realm was never more than an "aberration" because, according to them, Shi'ism and "Turkishness" have been historically incompatible with each other.⁵ On the other hand, a number of scholars in the second half of the century, while recognizing the existence of a substantial Kızılbaş community in early modern Anatolia, have overemphasized either the influence of pre-Islamic beliefs and traditions, the ignorance of local populations, or the intensity and permanence of the Sunni Ottoman administration's persecution of its non-Sunni (in this case, the Kızılbaş) subjects of the empire.⁶ Consequently, the Ottoman Kızılbaş existed in these foundational works mostly as the passive followers of the Safavid court against whom Istanbul's "keen sword" swung ceaselessly.

3 For detailed discussions on millenarian anxieties in the early modern period, see Subrahmanyam, *Turning the stones*; Fleischer, *The Lawgiver*; Özel, *Population changes*; Babayan, *Mystics, monarchs, and messiahs*; Bashir, *Deciphering the cosmos*; Bashir, *Messianic hopes*; Ocak, *Syncrétisme et esprit messianique*.

4 Minorsky, *Shaykh Bali-Efendi* 438, n. 4; Baha Said Bey, *Türkiye'de Alevi zümreleri* 404–406; Baştaş (trans. and ed.), *16. asırda yazılmış* 178–180.

5 Köprülü, *Türk edebiyatında ilk mutasavvıflar*; Günaltay, *Türk-İslam tarihine eleştirel bir yaklaşım*, and for a later era example of this approach, see Saray, *Türk: İran münasebetlerinde*. The so-called "Köprülü paradigm" has been widely criticized by several scholars. See, for instance, Karamustafa, *Origins of Anatolian Sufism*; Dressler, *Writing religion*; Karakaya-Stump, *The Kizilbash-Alevis*.

6 Bardakçı, *Alevilik*; Ocak, *Babailer isyanı*; Ocak, *Alevi ve Bektaşî inançlarının*; Ocak, *Din ve düşünce*; Mélikoff, *Uyur idik uyandırıldılar*; Arjomand, *The shadow of God* 79; Cahen, *Le problème du Shi'isme* 120; Eröz, *Türkiye'de Alevilik Bektaşîlik*; Roemer, *The Qizilbash Turcomans*; Imber, *The persecution*; Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-Iran siyasi münasebetleri*.

The revisionist historiographical wave of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century has rightfully criticized these previous approaches and broadened our horizon not only about the early modern Kızılbaş movement, but also about the nature of the Ottoman state and society in general.⁷ With a new set of concepts, debates, and perspectives to evaluate the past, recent studies have (re)contextualized the sociopolitical and religious undercurrents of the era to meaningfully evaluate the early modern Ottoman state and its involvement in the creation and dissemination of religious narratives and policies. Drawing on the studies examining the efforts taken by the state authorities in early modern Europe toward confessional uniformity, several historians of the eastern Mediterranean have recently proposed to reassess the Ottoman state's increasing emphasis on sectarian standardization in the early modern era under the rubric of "confessionalization." While Marcus Dressler has characterized these efforts of the Ottoman state as "inventing orthodoxy,"⁸ Tijana Krstić has convincingly argued that the Ottoman central authority's efforts at confession building in fact aimed "higher" than simply defining a confessional identity for its subjects, because a "tendency to sacralize authority exercised by the ruler" was also a way of maintaining social discipline.⁹ The Ottoman state's increasing emphasis on Sunnism in the highest political and scholarly circles was also noted by Hüseyin Yılmaz, who pointed to a sharp increase in the number of Ottoman polemical and nonpolemical accounts written during and/or right after Istanbul's military engagements with the Safavids, which depicted the Ottoman dynasty as the one chosen by God.¹⁰ At the same time, however, Derin Terzioğlu has argued that Ottoman Sunnitization was a "continuation of pre-existing trends" with multifaceted causes rather than "simply a politically minded response to the rise of the Safavids," and that a wider set of issues must be considered in order to get a better understanding of the phenomenon.¹¹

Although these scholars established that the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry radically changed the Ottoman imperial and scholarly language, their works' heavy emphasis on confession building has perpetuated—as an unintended consequence, I would say—the dichotomy between the Sunni Ottoman rulers and their non-Sunni/Kızılbaş subjects. As a response, this article, while building upon recent studies that have reevaluated Ottoman religious politics, inte-

7 See the scholarship produced by Yıldırım, Karakaya-Stump, and Zarinebaf listed in the bibliography.

8 Dressler, *Inventing orthodoxy* 141.

9 Krstić, *Contested conversions* 14.

10 Yılmaz, *Caliphate redefined* 218–228.

11 Terzioğlu, *How to conceptualize* 305.

grates a new set of questions into the picture to challenge the long-held view that the relationship between the Sunni rulers and their Kızılbaş subjects was irreconcilable and characterized by the state's perpetual persecution of the "defenseless" and/or "powerless" confessional nonconformists.¹² This is only possible with an in-depth examination and synthesis of the Ottoman imperial sources which reveals that, as a unique population situated in between the two mighty empires, the Ottoman Kızılbaş were neither the passive followers of the Safavid court nor the defenseless victims of the "never-ending" Ottoman persecution. On the contrary, even though Istanbul from time to time pursued policies targeting the Kızılbaş en masse, the same community embodied regional, socioeconomic, and political heterogeneity, and shaped the nature of the relationship between the Ottoman and Safavid courts. The Kızılbaş also indirectly influenced the formation and development of sectarian identities at both the state and the individual levels in the early modern era, from Ottoman Sunnism to Safavid Shi'ism and everything in between. While acknowledging possible limitations of relying on the sources written by the "ruler," not by the "ruled," I should note that this is an intentional approach as the goal here is to reexamine the status of the Kızılbaş and the power that they wielded vis-à-vis the political establishments of the region (i.e., the Ottoman and Safavid states) by scrutinizing the mundane-looking and often straight-forward state documents and narratives, which on the surface are heavily informed by sectarian language.¹³ The voice of the Kızılbaş as a substantial power holder of the era manifests

12 Several historians have recently challenged this dichotomy from different angles. Vefa Erginbaş has successfully demonstrated the heterogenous nature of Sunnism in the Ottoman domains. See Erginbaş, *Problematising Ottoman Sunnism*; Erginbaş, *Reading Ottoman Sunnism*. Stefan Winter brought further nuance to this picture by demonstrating the importance of pragmatism as the leading—yet often times neglected—factor that determined Istanbul's approach toward its Shi'i population, rather than confessional zealotry. Winter, *Shiites of Lebanon*. For a nuanced take on the ambiguities between Sunnism and Shi'ism in the context of medieval Anatolia, see Yıldırım, *Sunni orthodoxy vs. Shi'ite heterodoxy?*

13 The limited number of existing and available Kızılbaş sources provide us with certain clues on the sociopolitical and fiscal authority that the Ottoman Kızılbaş retained. See Karakaya-Stump, *Kızılbaş; Bektaşî, Safevî ilişkilerine dair*. However, one should mention that Kızılbaş sources carry their own limitations, since they mostly discuss the rules, regulations, and teachings of the Kızılbaş/Shi'i faith, religious and/or heroic poetry, or the pedigree of certain Kızılbaş families. The recent growing corpus on the Kızılbaş sources in general include Kaplan, *Yazılı kaynaklara göre Alevilik*; Kaplan, *Şeyh Safî buyruğu*; Ayyıldız, *Buyruk*; Birdoğan, *Alevî kaynakları*; Musalı, *Şeyh Safî Velâyetnâmesi*; Karakaya-Stump, *Documents and buyruk manuscripts*; Birdoğan, *Anadolu ve Balkanlar'da Alevî yerleşimleri*; Yaman, *Buyruk*; Taşğın, *Bisâtî, Şeyh Sâfî Buyruğu*; Yıldırım, *Geleneksel Alevilik*.

itself in these sources via the practices of conversion and reconversion, as well as the acts of negotiation, tax evasion, migration, and ultimately rebellion.¹⁴

Within this context, this chapter also problematizes the clear-cut boundaries between the sectarian camps in the early modern Middle East (i.e., Sunni Ottomans vs. Shi'i Safavids), as well as the depiction of the Kızılbaş population as caught in the middle, by elucidating the latter's vigorous and dynamic interactions with both sides based on individual and communal interests. To do so, I employ two broad frameworks. To begin with, I utilize the concept of "social conversion," which was coined by Richard Bulliet in his attempt to examine the Islamization, and later Shi'itization, of Iran.¹⁵ I use this concept to encapsulate the complexities of forming and shifting religious identities as behaviors with multifaceted thought processes, particularly in the early modern context denoting, in many cases, relocation "from one religiously defined social community to another" with nonreligious motivations playing a significant role in the process. Bulliet's approach, based on the argument that "leaving aside ecstatic converts, no one willingly converts from one religion to another if by virtue of conversion he markedly lowers his social status,"¹⁶ serves here as a significant tool for understanding the practice of political and religious conversion in the early modern Ottoman context, in which the members of the Kızılbaş community were active participants and negotiators rather than oblivious followers or the powerless victims of the imperial powers in play.¹⁷

The second framework that I employ in this article involves the notions of frontier, border, and borderland authority. As significant historical points of reference, borderlands in the early modern era revealed different state-society dynamics. These broadly defined "end territories," Palmira Brummet rightfully argues, were places "where one empire flowed into (and out of) another ... wars were fought, garrisons built, and allegiances tested."¹⁸ While the borders

14 A similar approach has been recently taken by several scholars in their attempts to scrutinize the Ottoman court's interaction with Kurdish tribes and tribal leaders. For instance, Baki Tezcan mentions an imperial document dating from the 930s/1530s giving privileges of hereditary rule to various Kurdish emirs in return for their loyalty to the Ottoman sultan, not the Safavid shah. See Tezcan, *The Development*. In a similar vein, Nelida Fuccaro examines the complexity of the Kurdish frontier between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. See Fuccaro, *The Ottoman frontier in Kurdistan*.

15 Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam*; Radushev, *The spread of Islam* 363–384.

16 Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam* 34, 41.

17 This approach can be criticized as being reductionist with its heavy emphasis on sociopolitical factors. While seeing this point, this study aims to strike a balance between the existing literature, in which the Kızılbaş have no power, and historical reality where, I argue, their power manifested itself via various forms and behaviors.

18 Brummet, *Mapping the Ottomans* 84.

of the Ottoman Empire with its western neighbors have been a popular topic among historians, the eastern Ottoman borders in the early modern era have not received comparable attention.¹⁹ A close reading of the sources reveals that in this context the Kızılbaş were an integral party in negotiating and maintaining the border between the Ottoman and Safavid empires, although by that I do not necessarily mean the conventional borders resulting from peace treaties but borders demarcated by sphere of influence that could sometimes be limited in one's own but extend deep into the other polity's territory. I call this type of demarcation of power and legitimacy as "domestic" or "inner" borders. Therefore, every Ottoman sultan and Safavid shah, being fully aware of the importance and the volatility of their borders, both in the sense of conventional and inner borders, had to (re)negotiate their position not only with the high-ranking members of their court and the provincial elites but also with the population(s) of the borderland regions, in this case the Kızılbaş, Kızılbaş-to-be, or former Kızılbaş. In return, these subjects amassed a significant degree of power as: the cultivators of the land and the providers of tax revenues; foot soldiers; the de facto intermediaries; defenders of the active border zones; and as the subjects who recognized one or the other state authority and thus played a key legitimating role. In other words, the three major participants in the political landscape of Anatolia (i.e., the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Kızılbaş) were concerned either with the expansion of their empire and the upholding of their legitimacy (in the case of Ottoman and Safavid courts), or with the protection of their status and way of life (in the case of ordinary subjects and community/tribal leaders alike). These motivations and concerns resulted in the cultivation of certain practices that often times crossed the presumed boundaries of sectarian adherences both by the state and its subjects.

Last, but not least, it is also important to emphasize that the term Kızılbaş always carried multilayered social, political, and fiscal meanings for individuals and institutions within the Ottoman and Safavid realms. As I have shown elsewhere, the Ottoman central authority began to refer to the sympathizers (both Ottoman and non-Ottoman) of the Safavid court as "Kızılbaş" only immediately prior to the reign of Sultan Selīm I (r. 918–926/1512–1520), who changed the nature of the relationship between Istanbul and the Safavid court with open military engagements and fiscal sanctions. In this context, the term "Kızılbaş"

19 Recent works on the topic of borders between the Ottoman Empire and its neighbors include Peacock (ed.), *The frontiers of the Ottoman world*; Heywood, *The frontier in Ottoman history*; Ágoston, *A flexible empire*; Kołodziejczyk, *Between universalistic claims and reality*; Zarinebaf, *Rebels and renegades*; Schwarz, *Writing in the margins of empire*; Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian borderlands*.

provided the negative labeling that the Ottoman central authority required to identify and pursue the enemy of the “religion and state” (*dīn-ü devlet*), given that the geopolitical legitimacy of Istanbul was at stake with the rapid emergence and expansion of the Safavid state on its eastern frontier.²⁰ As Guy Burak has cogently argued, this period also corresponds with the Ottomans’ adoption of the Hanafi *madhhab* as the official school of law under the aegis of the office of the chief mufti (or *şeyhül-islām*), bridging the gap between the Islamic (*sharia*) and sultanic (*kānūn*) law.²¹ Therefore, Ottoman policy makers, more often than not, disguised their nonreligious concerns with an increasingly sectarian rhetoric provided by various influential members of the same religious elite group. In the wake of this foundational period, the Ottoman court, starting with Süleymān the Magnificent (r. 926–974/1520–1566) and continuing for over a century, embraced a more complex approach toward both its Kızılbaş subjects and its rival, the Safavids, whereby the term Kızılbaş carried notably different, and in many cases conflicting, meanings depending on the context, as well as the genre of the documents in which such references were made.²²

Driven by the objective to emphasize the importance of fluidity and multi-causality behind the actions and loyalties, as well as the necessity to reconceptualize the importance of religion and religious belonging in the early modern Middle Eastern context, the following pages will focus on specific sources of the Kızılbaş authority and power: ability to migrate to the enemy territory and stop paying taxes and providing military services to the current ruler. It is my firm belief that the (re)formation of sectarian identities and their politicization in the early modern Middle East can only be fully grasped with this approach that reevaluates the position of the Kızılbaş within the Ottoman state and society by paying attention to the group’s intrinsic diversity, their economic interests and political grievances, as well as the complexity of the relationships that they forged with Istanbul and its regional representatives.

20 Baltacioğlu-Brammer, One word, many implications.

21 Burak, *The second formation of Islamic law*.

22 Baltacioğlu-Brammer, One word, many implications. For instance, Ottoman imperial documents often times labeled subjects (mainly, but not limited to the Shi’ites of Greater Syria) as Kızılbaş as a legal device in order to justify official violence in situations of brigandage and tax evasion, rather than on account of heretical beliefs. In the eyes of the Ottoman authorities, the Kızılbaş who sent money (and valuable gifts) to the Safavid shahs and sought to migrate to Safavid Iran represented the loss of a critical part of the empire’s revenue-producing work force and various orders were sent to the provinces to closely watch these subjects of the empire.

1 Ottoman-Safavid Rivalry, Its Frontiers, and Pecuniary Reasons of Religiopolitical Loyalty

According to Gábor Ágoston, “a common feature of the frontiers [of the Ottoman Empire] were the condominium, that is the joint rule, of the former power elite and the Ottoman authorities.”²³ This understanding is commonly used among scholars to contextualize the western borders of the empire, where Istanbul established and maintained tributary systems with various non-Muslim local power holders. A similar structure, however, existed on the empire’s eastern frontier(s) as well, even though the time frame of the expansion and the manner in which it came to be established differed significantly.²⁴ During the initial era of the Ottoman and Safavid interaction in southern and eastern Anatolia as well as in northern Iraq (between roughly the 880s and 950s/1480s and 1550s), many local tribes, communities, and individuals positioned themselves strategically between the two political entities, contingent upon obtaining material and territorial gains and privileges, as well as spiritual salvation (particularly in the case of loyalty and subjugation to the Safavids). This gave the inhabitants of this porous territory a rationale for supporting or fighting against either the Ottomans or the Safavids in their expansionist endeavors with various degrees of power of negotiation in hand. Accordingly, a high level of fluidity in the political allegiances of the local populations prevailed in the region.

Personal interests and intratribal frictions factored notably into the decision to switch sides when tribes in the regions between the two empires became aware of their ability to play the two imperial authorities off against each other. For instance, when Muḥammad Khan (d. 935/1528–1529), the Safavid governor of Baghdad, left the city and escaped to Basra after he learned that his tribe was collaborating against him with the Ottoman authorities, the Safavid shah Tahmāsb I offered him a better position in Basra.²⁵ In response, the Ottoman authorities countered by offering the rank of bey to three signifi-

23 Ágoston, *A flexible empire* 22.

24 Heywood, *The frontier in Ottoman history* 234–240; İnalçık, *Ottoman methods of conquest* 103–129. Erzurum and Diyarbakir were two of the few provinces in the region where the *tīmār* system was implemented. For the rest of the region, especially those parts inhabited by the Kurds, Istanbul implemented other systems, mainly *yurtluk-ocaqlık*, in which landholdings were typically transmitted from father to son. The holders of *yurtluk-ocaqlık* would keep the tax revenues of their landholdings while providing military services to the state. Ateş, *Ottoman-Iranian borderlands* 37–40; Ágoston, *A flexible empire* 20–25; Kılıç, *Yurtluk-Ocaklık*.

25 Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik* 51.

cant members of Muḥammad Khan's family in the region.²⁶ Contemporary sources also mention the frontier districts as the scenes of ongoing competition between the Ottomans and Safavids, as well as among the local elites and tribal leaders, who switched allegiance depending on personal and tribal interests. The story of Sulṭān Tekelu, an Ottoman *sipāhī* who "turned Kızılbaş" and defected to the Safavids with many members of his tribe during the Şah Kūlu Rebellion in Anatolia in 917/1511–1512, is a noteworthy case. The Safavid court rewarded Sulṭān Tekelu's defection with high-level political/military positions in the regions of Tabriz, Shirvan, and Baku.²⁷ The Tekelu tribe, however, was politically weakened as a result of conflicts among various Kızılbaş tribes for dominance in Azerbaijan, and following the death of Shah Ismā'īl in 930/1524, Sulṭān Tekelu this time marched against the new shah's forces. Defeated, he fled to the Ottoman fortress of Van to seek refuge in 940–941/1534.²⁸ He was later appointed *lālā*, or tutor, to the Safavid prince Alqās Mīrzā, who also sought refuge at the Ottoman court.²⁹

The military and political career of the Bidlīsī family, Kurdish overlords of the southeastern Anatolian province of Bitlis, further demonstrates how a frontier family played the Ottomans and Safavids against each other during much of the tenth/sixteenth century, specifically after the rise of the Safavids as the Ottomans' main geopolitical and religious rival in the east. Beginning with Sharaf Beg, grandfather of Sharaf al-Dīn, the author of the famous *Sharafnāma*, the Bidlīsī family made tactical shifts of allegiance to avoid being trapped between the two regional powers.³⁰ While Sharaf Beg supplied the Ottomans with detailed intelligence reports on events in Safavid territory,³¹ his son, Shams al-Dīn, migrated to Safavid Iran after Süleyman I appointed 'Ulāmā Beg, a Kızılbaş from Safavid Iran who had switched sides, the governor of Bitlis following the Ottoman campaign to Iraq in 939–940/1533–1534. Shams al-Dīn, along with the members of his tribe, was welcomed by Shah Tahmāsb I and honored with the title *khan* and the governorship of various districts in Safavid Iran. His son

26 Interestingly enough, Muḥammad Khan decided to work for the Ottomans again when Sharaf Khan changed sides and collaborated with the Safavids. Savaş, *xvi. asırda Anadolu'da Alevilik* 21.

27 Bidlisi, *The Sharafnāma* 145–146.

28 Riyāḥī, *Sefāratnāmeḥ-i Irān* 28; Monshī, *History of Shah 'Abbas* i, 80–83.

29 Solak-zāde, *Solak-zāde Tarihi* ii, 214.

30 For a comprehensive discussion on the Bidlīsī family, particularly Idris Bidlīsī, and their intricate interactions with the political authorities of the time, see Markiewicz, *The crisis of kingship*.

31 Glassen, Bidlīsī, Şaraf-al-Dīn Khan.

Sharaf al-Dīn, however, moved back to his hometown, Bitlis, after a series of meetings with the Ottoman general Hüsrev Pasha in 985–986/1578; as a reward, he was appointed governor.³²

Even though the contemporary accounts do not specify whether the members of the Bidlīsī family (or the above-mentioned Tekelu tribe) explicitly changed their sectarian affiliations whenever they changed their geopolitical allegiance, it is noteworthy that Sharaf al-Dīn's overt 'Alid loyalty³³ is quite visible in his chronicle, which he wrote as the Prince of Bitlis under the Ottoman rule. While narrating the events of 803/1401, for instance, he writes, "[Timur] opened the grave of Yazīd the cursed (*mel'ūn*), the son of Mu'āwiya," who ordered the killing of the third Imam Ḥusayn and his family, and burned his bones.³⁴ In another passage, while narrating the Timurid ruler Shahrūkh's (d. 850/1447) pilgrimage to Mashhad, Sharaf al-Dīn states that Shahrūkh left Herat to visit "our dear Imam and his splendid and heaven-scented tomb."³⁵ The persistence of 'Alid loyalty among the Sunnis of the Ottoman Empire—the phenomenon highlighted by Vefa Erginbaş in this volume and elsewhere—must have facilitated the fluidity of the political and religious sympathies among both common people and the tribal elites in the Ottoman-Safavid borderlands. Furthermore, these and many other examples show that while confessional affiliation played a significant role in shaping political allegiances, practical benefits were at least as—or more—important than the message of salvation.

The dynamic nature of the interactions between the Kızılbaş and the Ottoman and Safavid courts continued to exist after the Treaty of Amasya (962/1555), which designated a set of zones as the border between the two empires.³⁶ Following this treaty, the essential factor motivating the locals (both at the individual and communal levels) to side with either polity (or in some cases to stay relatively neutral) remained relatively the same, this time with heavier emphasis on receiving prestigious posts, titles, or money from the Ottoman and/or

32 Even when the level of Anatolian participation in the Safavid cause was at its peak, Ottoman counterpropaganda did not cease and often met with relative success. According to Sharaf Khan Bidlīsī, for instance, in 1535, around 3,000 Kızılbaş decided to defect to the Ottoman side after Süleyman I promised to make them rulers of Azerbaijan. Bidlīsī, *The Sharafnāma* 184.

33 On the notion of confessional ambiguity see Woods, *The Aqqyunlu* 1–24; Pfeiffer, Confessional ambiguity vs. confessional polarization. Also see Vefa Erginbaş's article in this volume, Reading Ottoman Sunnism.

34 Bidlīsī, *The Sharafnāma* 184.

35 Ibid. 86.

36 Ebel, Representation of the frontier.

Safavid capitals. This was particularly the case when the “new faith is perceived to be tied to a larger and more bountiful political economy.”³⁷ Therefore, the allocation of money, land, and titles, as well as marriage alliances with key members of the courts and the provincial elites served as successful strategies. According to Fariba Zarinebaf, the main consequence of this mentality was local border communities that were “divided, short of strong leadership, and lacking in effective resistance.”³⁸ While this was the case in certain situations, the local actors’ attempts to insert themselves into ongoing political (and religious) struggles and/or negotiations between the Ottoman and Safavid courts as active participants culminated in both short and long term material (and also strategical) gains for the individuals and the communities in the region alike.

Following the Treaty of Amasya, the Safavid leaders, while retaining their overall goal of creating and maintaining a strong base in Ottoman Anatolia, shifted their attention from recruiting large tribal populations to the Safavid cause, encouraging them to migrate to Safavid Iran, to targeting individuals and small groups, whose loyalty to the Safavid court manifested itself in multifarious ways. Particularly during the last decades of the tenth/sixteenth and early eleventh/seventeenth century, which saw serious domestic unrest within the Ottoman Empire, the religiopolitical loyalties of small groups and individuals were used to justify political actions, financial moves, and in some cases migrations. This situation is evident in Ottoman imperial documents as individuals with their names and religious/regional affiliations within the context of the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry began to appear more often after the mid-tenth/sixteenth century. For instance, Istanbul often utilized money and valuables to prevent individuals and groups from “becoming Kızılbaş.” In an imperial order from 982/1574, the governor of Diyarbakir was asked to honor a certain Shaykh Ebū’l-hayr Sālif Efendi with ten *aķçes* for not becoming Kızılbaş (*Kızılbaş mezhebine girmeyib*).³⁹ At the same time, the Ottoman central authority remained highly skeptical of tribes and large groups of people in the border regions who returned to the Ottoman realm (*tekrār ‘avdet eyleyen*) after “becoming Kızılbaş” and migrating to Safavid territory. Several imperial orders sent to frontier towns in Anatolia and Iraq in 980/1573 repeatedly warned the local authorities to capture those who came back from *Yukarı Cānib*, or the “upper side,” meaning mountainous Safavid territory, and to exile them imme-

37 Hefner, *World building* 29.

38 Zarinebaf, *Rebels and renegades*.

39 BOA, MD, Vol. 25, No. 1627 (17 Şefar 982/7 June 1574).

diately to remote parts of the empire, above all newly conquered Cyprus.⁴⁰ In other cases, an order sent to the governor of Şehrızor (Kirkuk) in 986/1578 mentioned the commander of a frontier fortress, Ḥasan, to whom the fortress was given with the condition of giving up his *kızıl tac* (i.e., the red headgear symbolizing loyalty to the Safavid shah). The order, after making a comparison with a certain Iskender, who—unlike Ḥasan—sent his *tac* to Istanbul to keep his *sanjak* (or district), accuses Ḥasan of not being reliable and asks the governor not to trust him again, to remove him from his official position, and to confiscate the *tac*.⁴¹

Moreover, an increasing number of Kızılbaş subjects of the Ottoman Empire made a payment, called *nezir* (or *nüzür*), to the Safavid religious and/or political authorities as a sign of sympathy and a source of support.⁴² Ottoman imperial documents show that as the intensity of the flow of money to the Safavid court increased, Istanbul became further concerned about possible revenue losses and its subjects' loyalties, particularly in the Anatolian countryside. Because the Ottoman central authority measured its own legitimacy in terms of tax collection, land cultivation, and battle-ready subjects, its struggle with the Safavids escalated as it attempted to secure its revenue sources and manpower.⁴³ This concern with tax evasion and loss of manpower can be seen as early as the correspondence between Sultan Bāyezīd II (886–918/1481–1512) and Shah Ismā'īl I. When Shah Ismā'īl asked Sultan Bāyezīd to let the followers of the Safavid order visit the order's center in Ardabil, the sultan responded that the Anatolian Kızılbaş could not be allowed to leave the Ottoman realm since they would not come back. Later, Bāyezīd expressed a willingness to allow his subjects to travel to Ardabil only if they made a commitment not to settle permanently in Safavid Iran.⁴⁴ On the other hand, relative acceptance was shown

40 BOA, MD, Vol. 21, No. 652 (22 Zilhicce 980/25 April 1573). It should also be noted that the Ottoman state was trying to repopulate the island. For further details on early modern Ottoman Cyprus, see Jennings, *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus*.

41 BOA, MD, Vol. 35, No. 816 (26 Şa'bân 986/28 October 1578).

42 For instance, an official letter sent to Erzurum in 960/1553 asks the governor to collaborate with the governors of Karaman and Anadolu to calculate the amount of *nezir* sent from the region of Sivas to the *öteki taraf* (literally, "the other side," i.e., the Safavids) by the *mülâhıde* and *râfıza*. BOA, Cevdet Tasnifi, Document No. 922–39839 (20 Ramazân 960/30 August 1553).

43 According to the mainstream Turkish historiography, however, Istanbul perceived this as the Safavids' exploitation of Ottoman subjects and thus would not allow it. Saray, *Türk-İran münâsebetlerinde Şiîliğin rolü* 31.

44 Feridün Beg, *Münşe'âtü's-selâtin* i, 328–329. Shah Ismā'īl's second request, sent in 1502–1503, was, however, not accepted by the sultan. Solak-zâde, *Solak-zâde Tarihi* 429; Sümer, *Safevî devletin kuruluşu* 26.

toward the “heretical” practices of particular Kızılbaş communities as long as the sultan could rely on local notables and tribal and religious leaders to guarantee the communities’ taxes. As Winter shows, among the first of Greater Syria’s tribal leaders to pledge loyalty to Selīm I on his conquest of the region in 922/1516 was the Kızılbaş family of Baalbek.⁴⁵

Furthermore, in the following decades, Ottoman sultans tried to differentiate between “fiscally loyal” and “fiscally disloyal” Kızılbaş populations under their rule. As Stefan Winter notes in the case of the Kızılbaş families in Syria, Ottoman policy makers labeled Shi’ites as Kızılbaş not on account of heretical beliefs but to justify official violence in the cases of brigandage and tax evasion.⁴⁶ Furthermore, in the Anatolian and Iraqi provinces, if a Kızılbaş individual or group remained peaceful and remitted their taxes, they were labeled only “Kızılbaş,” whereas if they rebelled and/or refused to remit their taxes, additional pejorative labels were attached to them, such as *mülhid*, *Rāfizi*, *ehl-i fesād*, *bī-namāz* or *bed-mezheb*.⁴⁷ In a similar vein, Istanbul managed fiscal appointments in many parts of Anatolia in a way that the Kızılbaş who were in close contact with the Safavid court were punished more severely than the Kızılbaş who were not. An order from 977/1570, for instance, asked the governor of Baghdad not to assign *muḳāṭa‘as*, a type of tax farm, to Burç ‘Alī and his peers in Mosul since they had been active on the frontier as Shi’i disciples (*Rāfizi serdār halīfeleri*).⁴⁸ Another decree sent to the governor of Divriği district (*sancaḳ*), Meḫmed Bey, in Şafer 976/August 1568 mentioned three *halīfes* who were collecting money and goods for the Safavid shah. While one of them was caught and executed, the other two escaped to Safavid Iran.⁴⁹ The anxiety of the Ottoman capital toward the financial power that the Kızılbaş subjects possessed is also manifested in other ways. For instance, 17 of the 33 *mühimme* orders from 978/1570–1571 that mention Kızılbaş individuals or groups detail Selīm I’s orders to local authorities to catch anyone providing financial support either to the shah’s court or to the center of the order

45 Winter, The Kızılbaş of Syria 46.

46 For further examples of Ottoman financial support for various Kızılbaş subjects, Ibid.; Öz, *Alevilik ile İlgili* 147. For further information on the Shi’ites of Greater Syria under the Ottoman rule, see Abu Husayn, The Shiites in Lebanon.

47 BOA, MD, Vol. 14, No. 311 (14 Şafer 978/18 July 1570); MD, Vol. 14, No. 488 (12 Ramazān 978/7 February 1571).

48 MD, Vol. 9, No. 79 (29 Ramazān 977/7 March 1570).

49 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, 7 Numaralı *mühimme* iii, 13–14, No. 1988 (10 Şafer 976/4 August 1568). The order pointed out that allowing them access to the public treasury, *beyt’ül-māl*, was unlawful (*cā’iz olmaya*) and, therefore, should be absolutely prevented (*kaṭ’i şürette*).

in Ardabil. In addition, local authorities were told to confiscate money and valuables that were being sent to the shah.⁵⁰ In many other cases, the flow of money was in the reverse, from the Safavid court to the Ottoman subjects, and Istanbul was equally anxious about it. An order from 987/1579 details Istanbul's concern over a transaction of 500 filori (Venetian ducats) between the Safavid state and Manşūr Halife of Tokat. The Kadis of nearby Zile and Artıkabad were sent to investigate this transaction and confiscate the money for the treasury.⁵¹

Ottoman central authority still applied the strategy of redistributing posts and benefits and granting privileged status to Safavid subjects who "turned" Sunni and/or moved to the Ottoman realm. However, these were fewer in number and mostly symbolic in Istanbul's counterpropaganda activities to win the "war of legitimacy" against the Safavid shahs. In one of the two noteworthy cases, Mehmed Sultān, the Kızılbaş governor of Qahqaha (Alamut) in northern Iran, took refuge in Istanbul in 995/1587, during the Ottoman-Safavid War of 986–999/1578–1590. In return for his loyalty to the Ottoman sultan and his help in conquering Ardabil, Mehmed Sultān and his immediate family were promised high official positions.⁵² Changing sides (more than once in certain cases) between the Ottomans and Safavids was relatively common among Kızılbaş emirs of the frontier regions.⁵³ Mehmed Sultān's migration to the Ottoman lands, however, was a sign of increasing Ottoman influence among the Kızılbaş emirs from the inner parts of Iran and left no choice for Shah

50 In an order from 978/1571, the Ottoman central authority asked the governor of Baghdad to inquire into the nature of the communication between its Ottoman Kızılbaş subjects and the Safavid Kızılbaş who came to the Ottoman realm to collect alms and to confiscate these alms: "*Yuḡarı Cānibden varanlara ne maḡūle kimesneler ihtilāt edip ve ne söyleşirler nuzūr (nezir) ve şadakāt gibi nesne götürürler mi götürēn ne aşıl kimesnelerdir ve Yuḡarı Cānib adamları ne aşıl kimesnelere mektūblar ve armaḡan götürmüşlerdir ve bi'l-cümle cemi aḡvāllerine vāḡf ve muṭṭalī' olub şıḡhati ile defter eyleyüb sana teslīm eyledikten sonra sen dahī te'hīr eylemeyüb Südde-i Sa'ādetime gönderesün.*" BOA, MD, Vol. 14, No. 376 (9 Ramazān 978/4 February 4, 1571).

51 BOA, MD, Vol. 40, No. 479 (28 Şa'bān 987/20 October 1579).

52 BOA, MD, Vol. 63, Nos. 59 and 60 (2 Şefar 995/11 January 1587). *Mühimme* records mention other Kızılbaş emirs and their families who moved to the Ottoman Empire in response to the ongoing Ottoman counterpropaganda. For example, see MD, Vol. 65, No. 444 (3 Şefar 998/11 December 1589); Kırzioğlu, *Osmanlılar'ın Kafkas* 378–379.

53 Monshī, however, singles out the Kurdish emirs for this behavior: "As in the custom of landowners in frontier areas, these men ["seditious Kurds"], as occasion demanded, from time to time attached themselves to the saddle straps of one of the rulers in the area and claimed to be his retainers, but their real motive was to stir up trouble and achieve their own ends in the ensuing confusion." Monshī, *History of Shah Abbas* 347.

‘Abbās but to sign a peace treaty with Istanbul in 998/1590.⁵⁴ In a second case, an official decree from Aḥmed I (r. 1012–1026/1603–17) granted the post of *kapıcıbaşı*, or chief doorkeeper, an honorary position typically given to converts, to a musician from the shah’s court upon his conversion to Sunni Islam.⁵⁵ Murād III (r. 982–1003/1574–1595) observed several staged conversions of Kızılbaş Iranians to Sunni Islam in the official circumcision ceremonies organized for his sons in 990/1582. The miniatures of the court historian, or *şehnāmeçi*, Seyyid Loḳmān’s *Şehnāme-i Selīm Hān*⁵⁶ and *Şehnāme-i Murād-i Sālīs*, as well as İntizāmī’s *Sūrnāme-i Hümāyūn*, written for this occasion, depict the public conversion of many Kızılbaş during the festival. In one of the paintings, an Ottoman subject is depicted throwing off his Kızılbaş turban in an attempt to gain the favor of the sultan, who is observing the scene from the balcony of the İbrahim Pasha Palace.⁵⁷

2 Ottoman Alienation of the Anatolian Population and the Issue of Migration

The gradual integration of Anatolia into the Ottoman Empire was followed by tensions emerging between the Ottoman central authority and the nomadic and seminomadic populations, including small beylicates of the peninsula, largely because of the Ottoman policies of centralization, taxation, sedentarization, and displacement which caused long-lasting problems, including

54 “The presence of the Ottomans and the successful revolt of the Kurds encouraged others to rebel: among them was a tribe which had long enjoyed the favor of the Safavid royal house, and which resided in the Solduz and Miandub districts of Maraga [an ethnically Turkish town in northwest Iran].” Ibid. 348–349.

55 BOA, Ali Emiri Tasnifi, I. Ahmed, File no. 7, Document no. 678 (1025/1616). Hülya Canbakal has analyzed the Ottoman registers of *seyyids*, or descendants of the Prophet, and suggested a link between the central authority’s attempts to regulate the allotment of *seyyid*-hood and its policies of containment of the Kızılbaş, for whom descent from the Prophet was particularly important. Canbakal, *Society and politics in an Ottoman town* 1–19, 61–90; Canbakal, *The Ottoman state and descendants*.

56 For a detailed study on the production process of *Şehnāme-i Selīm Hān*, see Fetvacı, *The production*.

57 Atasoy, *1582 Sūrnāme-i hümāyūn* 111. For further details on Murād III’s circumcision ceremony, see Zarinebaf-Shahr, *Rebels and renegades*; and Terzioğlu, *The imperial festival*. According to Muşṭafa Ālī, the narrator of the festivities in the *Sūrnāme-i hümāyūn*, the Safavid convert was a *hānzāde*, the son of a prince, who was rewarded with an office following his conversion to Sunni Islam. Terzioğlu, *The imperial festival* 86.

inflation, brigandage, and demographic fluctuations.⁵⁸ Turcoman and Kurdish tribes were the main disadvantaged parties in this process, and as a result they came to distrust the Ottoman administration. Tension between the tribes and the Ottoman state was especially pronounced in eastern and southeastern Anatolia on account of relatively recent imposition of Ottoman control over the region, and the higher level of tribal influence and power compared to other parts of the peninsula. Furthermore, the state presence was closely associated with constant military struggles, shifting borders, and spying activities,⁵⁹ which caused unrest among the dissatisfied and poorly organized rural populations who bore the bulk of the tax burden. The Celali Rebellions are often understood as a consequence of the tension between the tax-collecting state and the tax-paying subjects that accumulated in many parts of the peninsula and shook the state's authority for over a century.⁶⁰

This tension, however, did not always culminate in outright rebellion, particularly when the disgruntled taxpayers had other options available. In fact, many locals, from both urban and rural environments, reacted to centralization and overtaxation by migrating to the Safavid realm either individually or as members of tribal groups, because of the Safavids' assurance of greater autonomy for them. In general, Safavids consistently promoted its subjecthood as a legitimate alternative to Ottoman taxpayer status. Imperial orders preserved in the *mühimme* registers reveal that the Anatolian tribes (and individuals) became more interested in relocating to the Safavid realm as they faced increasing financial pressure from the Ottoman capital, primarily after the turn of the tenth/sixteenth century, which corresponded with the emergence of the Safavid Empire as a powerful religiopolitical actor in the region.

Immediate responses of the Kızılbaş toward the adverse effects of the Ottoman centralization policies and their contribution to the success of pro-Safavid efforts in Anatolia can be clearly seen with the "*tīmār* system," which was implemented in the early ninth/fifteenth century in much of the Balkans (see Grigor Boykov's paper in this volume on the reactions toward Ottoman centraliza-

58 Faroqhi, Politics and socio-economic change 95. For further information on the tensions between the early Ottomans and various Anatolia beylicates, see Emecen, *İlk Osmanlılar*; Karadeniz, *Osmanlılar ile beylikler arasında*; Kafadar, *Between two worlds* 90–117; Terzioğlu, Sufis in the age of state-building 89.

59 For more information on the Ottoman tribal policy and the tribes in the eastern frontier zone, see Sinclair, The Ottoman arrangements.

60 For details on these rebellions, see Akdağ, *Celali isyanları*; Griswold, *The great Anatolian rebellion*; Tekindağ, Şahkulu Baba Tekeli isyanı; Şahin, *Empire and power*. The conventional scholarship has regarded these rebellions as the result of Safavid instigation. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı tarihi* ii, 345–347; Saray, *Türk-İran münâsebetlerinde*.

tion policies in this region and their impact on religious dynamics) and in many parts of the Anatolian peninsula.⁶¹ While in principle *tīmārs* were allocated based on merit rather than family connections and prestige, the quasi-hereditary nobility of certain tribes and families was able to dominate the system from its inception.⁶² In many instances, Istanbul used the distribution of *tīmār* assignments as a tool to establish strong ties with local elites and “give them a stake in the Ottoman system”⁶³ so that they would not become disloyal to the Ottoman government. However, during the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries, control of *tīmārs* shifted from the entrenched tribal elite of the countryside, who had ties to the local population, to the urban elite. This process, combined with the increasingly oppressive behavior of the *tīmār* assessors, led to a sharp increase in dissidence among the rural population.⁶⁴ Complaints concerning *tīmār* assignments begin to appear in primary sources as early as the 1510s. According to an official document from this period, the main reason for the Kızılbaş rebellion of Shah Kūlu in 916–917/1511 was the unfair allocation of *tīmārs* to people from the inner circle of the palace and to local rulers, instead of meritorious cavalymen.⁶⁵ In a similar vein, the tenth/sixteenth-century Ottoman statesman Celālzāde Muṣṭafa Çelebi (d. 975/1567) points out that Anatolians fled to the Safavid side in droves simply because of Bāyezīd II’s negligence of his rural subjects, who were heavily oppressed by local authorities.⁶⁶

The situation continued during the second half of the tenth/sixteenth century as well.⁶⁷ As certain elite urban families monopolized *tīmār* allocations, a

61 A *tīmār* was a land grant, the revenue from which enabled the holder to outfit and support a number of cavalry forces and additional number of armed retainers (*cebeli*) for the Ottoman armies depending on the value and size of the land grant. Faroqhi, *Politics and socio-economic change in the Ottoman Empire* 94.

62 Haldon, *The Ottoman state* 55, 62–63.

63 Ibid. 55.

64 Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı tarihi* ii, 333. Tribal leaders were not the only disgruntled group whose dissatisfaction with the system culminated in serious unrest. Beginning in the early ninth/fifteenth century, frontier warriors (*gāzīs*) and the Sufis connected to them were similarly victimized by Ottoman centralization efforts. The Sufis voiced their dissatisfaction with the ulama, the “agents, allies and beneficiaries of a centralizing state ... [filling] the medreses at an unprecedented rate” and, in some cases, sided with the Safavids. Kafadar, *Between two worlds* 90–117; Terzioğlu, *Sufis in the age of state-building* 89.

65 Cited in Uluçay, *Yavuz Sultan* 53–90.

66 Celālzade, *Selim-nâme* 48b–51a.

67 Only ten percent of *tīmārs* were assigned to provincial cavalry soldiers in 1600. Tezcan, *The second Ottoman empire* 22.

divide grew between them, on the one hand, and tribal leaders and other members of the rural elite, on the other, who lacked the connections to acquire such grants and therefore felt betrayed by and alienated from the state. Celālzāde Muṣṭafa mentions Anatolian tribes whose members migrated to Safavid Iran when they lost their privileged status and *tīmārs* in the 910s/1510s and 920s/1520s.⁶⁸ Peçevî similarly explains how the disenfranchisement of certain tribes led them to join regional rebellions.⁶⁹

In the following decades, as more disgruntled *tīmār*-holders and tribal leaders, both of whom Kaya Şahin aptly describes as “the perennial malcontents of Ottoman history,”⁷⁰ as well as individuals seeking material gain and spiritual fulfillment, relocated to the Safavid realm, Istanbul began to pay increasing attention to these migrations. The Ottoman court frequently regarded these migrants as ignorant, lazy, or disloyal subjects who opposed the state for illegitimate reasons. In describing the influence of Safavid disciples in Anatolia, the Ottoman chronicler Kemālpaşazāde asserts that unemployed people who “had not achieved anything in their entire lives and who had no *tīmārs*” left their villages to join the *halīfes* with the false hope of becoming district governors on the Safavid side.⁷¹ Although Kemālpaşazāde is obviously biased against the Kızılbaş subjects of the Ottoman Empire and antagonistic toward the Safavids, he correctly points out that the oppressive *tīmār* policies of the Ottoman central authority and the lack of *tīmār* assignments to nonelites contributed significantly to the success of pro-Safavid efforts in early modern Anatolia.

In addition to witnessing “tremendous political and economic dynamism, a pervasive pragmatism, and an important level of social mobility and mobilization,”⁷² the sixteenth century also marked the monetization of the Ottoman economy even further with the large-scale transformation from the *tīmār* system to tax farming. In response to these socioeconomic transformations, “money, which had always constituted the sinews of government, acquired an unprecedented significance for the Ottoman administrative military apparatus, which seemed to need it more than ever.”⁷³ The central administration’s dire need for cash and, as a result of advances in military technology, declining need for cavalry resulted in a sharp decline in *tīmār* assignments and a

68 Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu’da Alevilik* 59, 156.

69 Peçevî, *Peçevî Tarihi* i, 94.

70 Şahin, *Empire and power* 125.

71 Kemālpaşazāde, *Tevārīh-i Âl-i Osmân* ix, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, MS Fatih 4221, 198a, cited in Uğur, *The reign of Sultan Selīm I* 43.

72 Şahin, *Empire and power* 10.

73 Tezcan, *The second Ottoman empire* 11.

corresponding increase in tax farms (*iltizām*). Many Kızılbaş Anatolians felt cheated by this transformation on account of corruption and overtaxation. They also suffered from the effects of the general late tenth/sixteenth-century crisis, notably population pressure and climate change.⁷⁴

Both empires were fully aware of the fiscal power of the Kızılbaş, and this concern became manifested in the peace treaties signed between the two capitals. Istanbul reciprocated Safavid efforts at keeping the peace treaties intact by enforcing their articles, particularly in the frontier regions. For instance, while Sunni Iranians were not allowed to migrate to the Ottoman realm, official orders sent from Istanbul called for the investigation and punishment of Ottoman individuals or groups who violated the agreement between the two empires as well.⁷⁵ A series of imperial orders, likewise, warn the governor of Van to pay utmost attention to and prevent any type of infringement of the Amasya Peace Treaty following rumors of Ottoman subjects attacking the Safavids and plundering their land and property. These orders ultimately asked the governor to find and to punish severely the violators harming the Safavid frontier tribes of Brados and Lityan, after mentioning that the Safavids have been fulfilling their responsibilities.⁷⁶ Furthermore, countless imperial orders requested the Ottoman authorities in central and eastern Anatolia to stop these migrations. A series of orders from the 960s/1560s, for instance, demanded from the rulers of Amasya, Tokat, and Çorum, heavily Kızılbaş towns in north central Anatolia, to investigate the large numbers of migrants, some of whom had been stopped in Erzurum in northeastern Anatolia and barred from entering

74 Ibid. 17. Sam White convincingly argues that the suitable ecological environment of the first half of the tenth/sixteenth century allowed the Ottoman central authority to pursue expansionist policies, to create an Ottoman elite class, and to forge ahead with state formation. However, as the state apparatus grew, "Ottoman systems of provisioning and settlement faced mounting problems. Just as the Ottomans proved especially precocious at building these systems, so they became particularly dependent on their stability and susceptible to their failures," particularly during the critical periods of "population pressure, inflation, and diminishing returns from agriculture" from the 970s/1570s to the 990s/1590s. White, *The climate of rebellion* 19.

75 For examples, see Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, 3 *Numaralı mühimme* 517–518, No. 1168 (966–968/1558–1560); Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, 5 *Numaralı mühimme* 270, No. 1721 (10 Zilka'de 973/29 May 1566).

76 "Mādām ki ol cānibden şulh ve şalāha muğāyir vāz' şādūr olmağa bu cānibden bir ferde şulh ve emāna muhālif iş eylemekten ihtiyāt eyleyib şulh ve şalāh umūrun gereği gibi ri'āyet eyleyüb." BOA, MD, Vol. 14, No. 756 (28 Cemāziyülāhır 978/27 November 1570). The same order, however, asks the governor to keep sending "useful and civilized" (*yārār ve müte-meddin*) spies to Safavid Iran. See also BOA, MD, Vol. 18, No. 57 (29 Ramazān 979/14 February 1572).

the Safavid realm.⁷⁷ In another order from the late 1560s, the ruler of Trabzon was cautioned about the increasing risk of the entire Kızılbaş population migrating to Safavid Iran if their relations with the Safavid court were not cut off immediately.⁷⁸ While many of these orders do not specify individuals and their attempts to migrate to Safavid Iran, others address specific local elites and tribes, whose migration had a greater impact on both sides. For instance, Istanbul repeatedly warned the governor of Erzurum about the Turcoman Batlu tribe from Ardahan, whose leader fled to the “other side,” ordering him to stop the tribe’s members from following their leader and to find and execute the leader himself.⁷⁹ The leader of the Kurdish Belilhānoğulları tribe from the Van/Tabriz region, for instance, migrated to the Safavid side and sought help from Shah ‘Abbās I in 1010–1011/1602. The Ottoman governor of Tabriz, ‘Alī Pasha, responded by provoking a military conflict between the two sides that resulted in the occupation of Tabriz by the Safavids in 1012/1603.⁸⁰

As Robert Hefner asserts, early modern communities “burdened with a sense of oppression and powerlessness [were] in need of ... social redemption, that is, a state that provides relief from an intolerable situation through new morality and social relations.”⁸¹ As mentioned above, the emergence of the Safavid Empire right next door to Anatolia and the formation of a new religiopolitical identity around the Safavid Sufi order provided Anatolians with a legitimate political and territorial alternative. Celālzāde Muṣṭafa, in his *Ṭabaḳātü'l-memālik ve derecātü'l-mesālik*, describes this period, with his typically strong anti-Safavid prejudice, as one in which “a band of naked dervishes, runaway Turkish peasants, and heretics” (*bir bölük çıplak ışıklar, çiftbozan Türkler, münâfıklar*) attacked sharia and *ḳānūn* and killed Sunnis under the influence of the “sharia-abrogating and sedition-filled East” (*şark-ı şer-fark ve fitne-gark*).⁸² Despite his gross generalization and open hostility against the Safavids and their Anatolian sympathizers, the Kızılbaş, indeed, became not only an object of the Ottoman-Safavid competition but also an active participant and contributor to it.⁸³ On occasion, various Safavid actors, disguised as merchants or travelers, orchestrated these migrations. For instance, Istanbul warned the governor of Baghdad in 980/1573 about a certain Sohrāb who had entered Ottoman

77 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, 3 *Numaralı mühimme* 630, No. 1422 (Zilkā'de 967/August 1560).

78 Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, 5 *Numaralı mühimme* 221, No. 1401 (973/1565).

79 BOA, MD, Vol. 21, No. 110 (19 Ramazān 980/23 January 1573).

80 Saray, *Türk-İran Münasebetlerinde* 38.

81 Hefner, *World building* 29.

82 Cited in Şahin, *Empire and power* 69–71, 90–91.

83 Dressler, *Inventing orthodoxy* 153.

territory allegedly to fetch the daughter of a Safavid regional ruler but instead took many members of a local tribe back to Iran with him.⁸⁴ As another precaution against this type of migration, Istanbul several times asked local authorities not to let the Safavid Iranians mingle with the locals when they visited their towns for trade or pilgrimage.⁸⁵ Within a short period, however, thousands whose dissatisfaction stemmed from financial devastation, the lack of sustainable revenues, and overtaxation decided to relocate as the Safavid realm promised less taxation, more autonomy, and salvation through allegiance to a messianic ruler. According to Rudi Matthee, the Safavid shahs from the beginning attempted to build a state on the notions of “shared religion, a long legacy of strong personalized authority, and a governmental tradition centering on royal justice and commercial activism.”⁸⁶

These migrations meant not only the loss of population, but also the loss of income and goods, which in many cases were more crucial for the Ottoman court, which led to a flurry of imperial orders attempting to stop the outflow.⁸⁷ In one order from 982/1574, the sultan asked the governor of Van to stop the migration of the Haledi tribe, who had been paying their dues and taxes (*hukuk ve rüsumları*) to the Ottomans, to the Safavid territory. In many instances, Istanbul also asked the Safavid court to send back Ottoman subjects who had already migrated.⁸⁸ Istanbul justified these requests by invoking the Peace of Amasya, which banned migrations from one side to the other.⁸⁹ For instance, in an order from 1574, the sultan told the governor-general of Baghdad to accept those who had moved to Safavid Iran and come back following the peace, regardless of their sect (*madhhab*).⁹⁰

84 BOA, MD, Vol. 21, No. 697 (29 Zilhicce 980/2 May 1573).

85 BOA, MD, Vol. 23, No. 430 (29 Zilhicce 981/21 April 1574); MD, Vol. 24, No. 124 (29 Zilkade 981/23 March 1574).

86 However, decentralizing forces (“formidable mountain regions, fearsome deserts, a harsh climate, long distances, and a thinly spread and largely nomadic population,” as well as “the lack of an effective infrastructural state power”), prevented a strong state from materializing. Matthee, *The politics of trade* 232.

87 For an earlier discussion on this topic, see Allouche, *The origins and development*. Allouche rightfully emphasized the importance of trade for both the Ottoman and Safavid courts and the consecutive attempts to secure them with various policies that included signing agreements and dispatching envoys on the one hand and closely monitoring trade-related activities and punishing those who acted against the rules and regulations on the other.

88 BOA, MD, Vol. 26, No. 496 (10 Cemâziyelevvel 982/27 August 1574).

89 BOA, MD, Vol. 26, No. 78 (28 Şefar 982/18 June 1574).

90 BOA, MD, Vol. 26, No. 958 (14 Şa'bân 982/28 November 1574). The following orders warn the governor-general of Baghdad not to send the returnees back to Iran even if the Safavid court requests it. For an example, see BOA, MD, Vol. 26, No. 974 (15 Şa'bân 982/29 November 1574).

3 Conclusion

As the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry turned into a conflict shaped by sectarian narratives, the religious and political identities of the subjects between the two emerging empires became closely intertwined. The increasing sympathy for the Safavids among the Ottoman subjects, however, did not stem solely from confessional priorities of those seeking salvation through becoming the followers of the shah. The regions from which the largest number of people converted to Kızılbaşism and/or migrated to Safavid Iran were usually those experiencing economic problems or political disturbances, mostly deriving from the policies of the Ottoman central authority. In other words, various worldly concerns—sociopolitical and fiscal pressures or enticements, the loss or prospect of posts and pensions—constituted significant motives behind becoming or remaining a Kızılbaş in the early modern Ottoman realm. This dynamic created a horizontal power relation between the Ottoman imperial center and its subjects, in which the power holder status of the Kızılbaş manifested itself as a combination of multifarious decisions taken against (or for) the central authority and its representatives in the provinces. In these interactions, many Kızılbaş individuals and groups acted as mediators, negotiators, facilitators, and also as rebels.

This article has also demonstrated the complexity of the interactions among the three major participants in this specific geopolitical environment (i.e., the Ottoman and Safavid courts and the Kızılbaş) that went beyond the conventional Sunni-Shi'i division. The cases provided here, as a small sample from a larger pool, provide us with strong indicators of the nature of the relationship between the Ottoman central authority vis-à-vis its Kızılbaş subjects, as well as the constant efforts made by both the Ottomans and Safavids to retain this population's loyalty. By contextualizing and historicizing the actions taken by the Kızılbaş, these cases display the enmeshment of sectarian policies with the oft-neglected issues of political, religious, and fiscal motivations in inter-confessional and interimperial contact zones. From this angle, one can see the utility of approaching this history "laterally" as opposed to top-down or bottom-up approaches that imagine the relations between the ruler and the ruled in terms of vertical relations of power. Last but not least, the increase in punitive actions and persecutions that the Ottoman central authority took against the Kızılbaş subjects of the empire should be scrutinized within this context. In other words, in the eyes of Istanbul, the conversion, tax evasion, and migration of its subjects to Safavid Iran represented the loss of a critical part of the empire's work force, and the Kızılbaş population(s) was fully aware of this. While the Ottoman central and provincial authorities dealt with them through

multifaceted policies (from offering new titles, land autonomy, and tax exemption on the one end, to heavy persecution on the other), fiscally and politically motivated conversions and/or migrations to and from Safavid Iran constituted a significant aspect of the early modern era and continued until the beginning of the twelfth/eighteenth century, albeit with decreasing intensity.⁹¹

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