

Islam and Competing Nationalisms:
The Kurds and the Turks in the late Ottoman Era

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ABSTRACT

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Islam and Competing Nationalisms: The Kurds and the Turks in the late Ottoman Era is a work, which traces how religion was intimately intertwined with nationalism during the crucial period of the late nineteenth century in the Modern Middle East. In this approach, I call into question the extent to which the principle of secularism and ethnicity serve as the only foundations of the modern nation state. Within the context of the late Ottoman Empire, my research foregrounds the differences between interpretations of Islam at the center and the myriad understandings of Islam adopted by those on the margins. I demonstrate how diverse Muslim communities (Arabs, Kurds and Turks) have linked their interpretations of 'authentic' religion to claims of 'ethnic superiority' during the process of nation building. I contend that this tension between the normative State interpretation of Islam and alternative visions was critical in shaping modern nationalism in the Middle East. This is significant for establishing how nationalism can in turn affect the range of religious interpretations. My work thus provides a new historically grounded theoretical foundation for recent debates on nationalism that have emerged in recent decades. My dissertation is based on a close examination of British archival records, Ottoman state records, Ottoman journals and other primary sources in Arabic, Kurdish (both Kurmanci and Sorani dialects), Persian and modern Turkish -- most of which I obtained during my yearlong field research as a Fulbright scholar.

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ABBREVIATION

A AMD	Amedi Kalemi
A MKT MHM	Sadaret Mektubi Mühimme Kalemi
A MKT MVL	Meclisi Vâlâ
A MKT NZD	Sadaret Mektubi Kalemi Nezaret ve Devair
A MKT UM	Umum Vilâyet
A MKT	Mektubi Kalemi
BOA	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi
BEO	Bâb-ı Âli Evrak Odası, Sadaret Evrakı (A)
HR MKT	Hariciye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi
HR SYS	Hariciye Siyasi
ID	İrade Dahiliye
IH	İrade Hariciye
IM	İrade Mesail
IMM	İrade Meclis-i Mahsus
MV	Meclisi Vükelâ Mazbataları
MVL	Meclis-i Vâla Evrakı Hülâsa Kayıt Defterleri
PRO FO	Public Reord Office, Foreign Office
Y A HUS	Sadaret Hususi Mevzuat Evrakı
Y A RES	Sadaret Resmi Maruzat Evrakı
YEE	Yıldız Esas Evrakı
Y MTV	Yıldız Mutenevvi Mâruzat
Y PRK A	Sadaret Mâruzatı
Y PRK ASK	Askeri Mâruzatı
Y PRK BSK	Mabeyen Başkitabeti

Y PRK DH	Dahiliye Nezareti Mâruzatı
Y PRK M	Mütefferrik
Y PRK MYD	Yaveran ve Maiyyeti-i Seniyye Erkâni Harbiye Dairesi
Y PRK NMH	Nâme-i Humayunlar
Y PRK PT	Posta ve Telgraf Nezareti
Y PRK TNF	Ticaret ve Nafia Nezareti
Y PRK TŞF	Teşrifat-ı Umumiye Dairesi
Y PRK UM	Umum Vilayetler Tahrirati
Y PRK	Yıldız Perakende Evrakı

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Introduction

What is called nationality ‘*milliyet*’ is [rooted in] the depth of the past, the vast deserts of the present and future. [It is rooted in] the Kurdish prodigies’ [voices] like that of the son of Zal, Rustam, and of Salah ad-Din Ayyubi’s, gathered as one family in a tent on the mountain top...commending you all to turn into a single soul who embodies the unity of nation for the sake of its protection and happiness... [It is] with the emergence of the national sentiment that [one’s] morality evolves.

- Bediüzzaman Said Kurdi or Nursi¹

Islam appeared as a protest against idolatry. And what is patriotism but a subtle form of idolatry; a deification of a material object. The patriotic songs of various nations will bear me out in my calling patriotism a deification of a material object. Islam could not tolerate idolatry in any form. It is our eternal mission to protest against idolatry in all its forms. What was to be demolished by Islam could not be made the very principle of its structure as a political community. The fact that the Prophet prospered and died in a place not his birthplace is perhaps a mystic hint to the same effect.

-Muhammad Iqbal²

Scholarship on late Ottoman society, including on the Kurds, in general, tends to present Muslim history with a certain uniformity. It is only after World War I and with the rise of Kemalism that the history of Muslim nationalist thought is treated as a fact in the related historiography. The historical disparity among the various “Muslim people of Asia Minor” and their assumed “lack of ethnic self-consciousness”³ is presented as an indisputable historical fact and the idea that nationalist tendencies among Muslims existed before World War I is vehemently rejected. In this discursive construct of the past, the emergence of Turkish

¹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*(2009), 189.

² Muhammad Iqbal, *Stray Reflections* (Iqbal Academy, 1910), 35.

³ See, Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*(London, New York,: Oxford University Press, 1961).

nationalism is equated with the birth of the “modern Turkish state.” The same period is also treated as the birth date of Muslim nationalisms in the Middle East.

The present work deals principally with the question of the relationship between modern Islamic thought and nationalism. However, it is more concerned with certain trends in Islamic religious thought in the late-Ottoman period than the Muslim world at large. I shall concentrate on the possibility that modern Islamic thought and nationalism reciprocally influenced each other by mainly investigating the Kurdish and Turkish cases that reflect the historical relationship of Islamic thought and ethno-nationalism. I aim to demonstrate the malleability of religious interpretation that allows for the smooth ingression of nationalist discourses in religious thought and vice versa.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, nationalist discourse was incorporated into newer interpretations of Islam. Various interpretations that were put forth by major Islamic religious leaders illustrate a new reality.⁴ The present work attends to differences between the interpretation of Islam in the core areas of the Ottoman Empire and the understandings of Islam adopted by those living in the periphery. Different communities often linked their interpretations of ‘authentic’ Islam to claims of ‘ethnic superiority.’ Islam became intimately intertwined with nationalism during this crucial period. However, the connection between the two appears in different forms and modes. In the late 19th century, the Ottoman state attempted to dictate what constituted ‘correct’ Islam and became increasingly skeptical of peripheral Islam(s). Conversely, Muslim communities in the periphery viewed the state and centralist tendencies as degenerative and morally lax. The case of Sheikh Ubeydullah, which I discuss in chapter six, exemplifies this

⁴ Cf. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, *Um Al-Qura* (Cairo: al-Azhar, 1931). Muhammad 'Abduh, *Al-Islam Wa Al-Nasraniyye/ Islam and Christianity* (Cairo: al-Manar, 1323/1905); Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehri, *Tuhfetul Ehabab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri*, ed. Seyid Isalm Duagû (Urmia: Husseini 2000).

trend. The propagation of state-sanctioned Islam became increasingly tied to official nationalist practices and policies, which were contested and resisted by dominated ethnic communities.

To explain Ottoman state vision and policies, I employ both newspaper articles from Istanbul journals and a wide variety of Ottoman and British archival materials alongside primary materials in Arabic, Persian, and Kurdish. I aim to demonstrate the systematic effort by the state to Turkify education and restrict the use of non-Turkish languages. In discussing the Turkification of the language of instruction during the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876- 1909) I make extensive use of Ottoman state records and journals to emphasize that the state had no qualms about privileging Turkish and restricting other languages.

As noted at the outset, generally scholarship on Ottoman history has questioned the possibility of the existence of Muslim nationalism prior to World War I. I will later (in Chapter 3) briefly attend to the problematic nature of those approaches to nationalism in the Empire. Though some scholars do see Hamidian rule as a catalyst for the rise of nationalism, I will go a step farther and argue that belief in the latency of Turkish nationalism reflects the influence of Orientalist scholarship and of the later Kemalist/Republican historiography. Comparing the literature produced by the pre-Republican nationalists with that of the later Kemalist/Republican nationalists clearly sheds light on discrepancies in the Turkish nationalist reading of the pre-1912 Ottoman past. Additionally, a more rigorous scrutiny of the state records and Ottoman journals problematizes the common conception of Ottoman Turkish nationalism as latent.

Furthermore, the Ottoman state's discourse on Islamic identity, unity or the caliphate should not be taken at face value, nor should it be viewed as an inclusionary Islamic discourse. Firstly, there is an important inconsistency in the ways in which the Ottoman state and elite—beginning with the Hamidian regime—emphasized both Islamic identity and unity. Secondly,

such concepts have been historically interpreted in a variety of ways. The employment of common signifiers does not necessarily nullify their particular or exclusive signification and they could be misleading if treated as timeless and isolated from their socio-historical context. Therefore, it is essential to put the Ottoman caliphate in its historical context to see how it was perceived by non-Turkish Muslims. It is thus not a contradiction to assert that the upswing of official Ottoman nationalism and the Hamidian state's renewed claim to the caliphate were concurrent. In fact, it was in the Hamidian era that Ottoman official nationalism significantly began to occupy cultural, bureaucratic, and educational space.

The Ottoman state records show a drastic change in the state's education and linguistic policy after Abdülhamid II's accession to power in 1876. Ottoman archival documents attest to the fact that local government officials allowed for some leeway in mandating Turkish-language education in the pre-Hamidian era. However, not long after coming to power, Sultan Abdülhamid made Turkish education mandatory throughout the Empire. This reflected both centralization and a growing Turkish nationalism. The result was a shrinking of space for the cultural and literary production of non-Turkish Muslim groups such as Albanians, Arabs, and Kurds. The state's language-based Turkification policies went hand in hand with its disdainful attitude toward peripheral or non-Turkish Islam. Such attitudes toward the peripheral region were reproduced and reflected in contemporary Ottoman works by the elite, who saw it as their mission to modernize Islam and to civilize the periphery. Their suspicions were more rooted in civilizational discourse rather than sectarian differences, as was pointedly illustrated by their discussions in Ottoman press.

It becomes evident that the Ottoman elite's effort to differentiate themselves from other Muslims was informed by their nationalism and ethnic self-perception—as the only ethnic group

capable of modernizing ‘the rest.’ The literature of the time evidences their self-glorification as the vanguards of change in the Muslim world. The Ottoman elite’s view of the ethnic Other became manifestly scornful as they increasingly saw themselves burdened with the mission of civilizing the rest. In the mind of the elite, the traditional *Sunni-Shi‘i* divide would increasingly lose its significance. They thus adopted ethnic belonging and an affinity to “civilization” to underscore their uniqueness. The rationale given by certain Ottoman intellectuals for opposing Iranian participation in a possible Islamic unity exemplifies this trend. The disqualification was not based on a rejection of the legitimacy of *Shi‘i* beliefs. Rather, it was because of Iranian “uncivilized-ness” and their *hatred for the Turks*.⁵ Such attitudes toward the Other were plainly displayed in literary works by iconic figures such as Ahmad Midhat and Şems ad-Din Sami. Ahmad Midhat, for instance, insisted that Turks possessed a better command of Islamic zeal than Arabs. In his journal, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, Midhat went so far as to claim that the Qur’an itself was not an Arabic text but instead was the language of God. This reflected a transformation of the idiom of Turkish nationalism whereby Turkish Islam was to be decoupled from Arabic, supposedly a “backward Semitic language.”

Şems ad-Din Sami, the famous playwright, lexicographer and litterateur, went even further, claiming that in comparison to other ethnic communities, Arab contributions to Islam were all too negative. In 1870s, Namik Kemal had characterized the role Arabs, in their contributions to contemporary Islam thought, as nothing more than their following of their Turkish brethren. Compared to Namik Kemal’s remarks, in the previous decade, views expressed by intellectuals such as Sami and Midhat represented a rapid shift in the Ottoman elite’s perceptions of peripheral communities. This occurrence signified the rise of cultural and official

⁵ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. No: 595 (Jun 7, 1880).

Ottoman nationalism and the Ottoman elite's attitudes toward the peripheral rest and their eagerness to dictate who was a civilized Muslim.

Numerous non-Turkish writers and thinkers also laid out their own criteria for being a true Muslim. In fact, it is only in the context of the rise of rival Muslim nationalisms that one can make sense of the nationalist utterances by Arab revivalists such as Muhammad 'Abdu and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi. It is against this background that al-Kawakibi asserts that unlike that of the other Muslim communities, the blood of the Arabs of the Peninsula remains pure and unmixed and they are therefore uniquely well-suited for the leadership of the Muslim world.⁶ Such emphasis on one's purity of blood, a tacit claim to the existence of real Quraishis—supposedly the rightful owners of the caliphate—signifies the rise and pervasiveness of ethno-nationalistic politics among Muslims.

It becomes clear that in the late 19th and early 20th century, nationalist discourse smoothly made its way into newer Islamic interpretations. As Ussama Makdisi rightly notes, the Ottoman elite seem to have been the pioneers of “derivative nationalism” (as defined by Chatterjee) in the Muslim Middle East.⁷ (It is a type of nationalism which, despite its modern characteristics, refuses a complete emulation of the West. Rather, it insists on the concurrent preservation and re-appropriation of native culture.)⁸ However, the derivative nationalism of the Ottomans did not necessarily produce Muslim unity (just as European nationalisms did not produce Christian unity). Native or, more precisely, national culture did not seem to have included that of the non-Turks. Rather, Islamic interpretations became increasingly exclusionary. That is why Ottoman

⁶ al-Kawakibi, *Um Al-Qura*, 196-97.

⁷ Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (Jun., 2002): 785.

⁸ See, Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

Muslim modernizers such as Hamdi Bey believed that their task was “to save Ottoman heritage not just *from the West* but also from the *Oriental peoples of the Ottoman Empire*.”⁹

With the progression of time such nationalistic approaches similarly influenced the non-Turkish communities’ interpretations of Islam. Some scattered texts produced by Kurdish elites and intellectuals, found in late 19th century Ottoman journals, reveal the existence of similar nationalistic tendencies.¹⁰ The attempt to “narrate” a nation that “is endowed with a past,”¹¹ became the immediate concern of many Muslim figures. Kurdish intellectuals strove to introduce a “civilized Muslim Kurdish nation” with a distinct history almost completely detached from that of other Muslims.

For many Muslim religious figures, whose main function was to lead communal religious affairs, it had become fashionable to use nationalistic language and casually redraw Islamic boundaries along ethno-nationalistic bonds. Under the increasing influence of nationalism such figures’ interpretations of Islam hardly sounded inclusive. Consequently, some prominent Muslim figures, as discussed in Part III, would allude to their own differential ethnic characteristics rather than emphasizing “non-dissolvable Islamic links.” Nowhere was this clearer than in the poetic oeuvre of the Kurdish Naqshbandi Sheikh Ubeydullah (written during 1878 and 1880).

The Sheikh’s portrayal of the two communities—the Turks and the Kurds — as two distinct and rival groups is undeniable. In his poetic work and sporadic letters the “us” versus “them” dichotomy is defined in both Islamic and ethno-nationalistic terms. This type of religious

⁹ Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 786. (Emphasis added)

¹⁰ See Chapter 5.

¹¹ I am borrowing Chatterjee’s phrasing. See, Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Oxford India Paperbacks (Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 75.

thinking, revealing a Muslim ethno-nationalistic consciousness, was prevalent. The most renowned Kurdish religious scholars like Bediüzzaman Said Kurdi (or Nursi) saw the religiosity of the center as suspicious, contaminated, and inauthentic.¹² Contrasting it with the Islam in Istanbul, Bediüzzaman deemed Kurdish Islam as pure and authentic as “the clean air of the high mountains of Kurdistan.” Generally these religious figures’ understanding of Islam contained claims to cultural superiority. Thus, the ‘in-group’s’ Islam and religious devotion is the most celebrated, while that of the ‘out-group’ is strongly questioned. It is against this background that Sheikh Ubeydullah attributes the Kurds’ “superior qualities” (religious and otherwise) to their “noble ethnic origin.” This condition illustrates the fusion of religious with ethno-national consciousness, which is idealized by Bediüzzaman Nursi when he asserts that whomsoever can be said to embody nationalist consciousness “mirrors (*ma’kas*) her/his own nation.”¹³

I subscribe to Modernist views about nationalism. Nationalism, in the present work, is understood as various attempts by which modern communities ground the legitimacy of their claim to self-rule and statehood in their very own self-perception and self-description.¹⁴ Ethnicity, identity, and glorified national pasts are re-interpreted and reconstituted. It is through such re-interpretive processes that nationalist agents also attempt to reform and re-appropriate religions. Nationalism here is thus understood as the collective religious, cultural and linguistic attempts and processes through which communities legitimize their claims to self-determination and sovereignty.

¹² See Chapter 7.

¹³ Nursi, *İçtimai Dersler/ Social lessons*, 189.

¹⁴ See, Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London ; New York: Verso, 1991); Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, New Perspectives on the Past (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1983).

In my study, the nation is not considered either primordial or an essential continuity of the pre-modern “*ethnie*.” Instead it is modern communities’ struggle to legitimate their demands for self-rule by way of communal self-differentiation. Such differentiations are understood as the foundation of modern nationalism. Ethno-symbolism, as defended and expanded by theorists such as Anthony Smith and John Hutchinson, espouses some important elements in modernist thought.¹⁵ Smith’s argument concerning “*ethnie*,” in which both religious and secular intelligentsia take up the project of legitimizing their claims for nationhood is in some ways useful for the present work. Smith argues that there exist two types of *ethnie*. The first is based on the myth of origin utilized by elites who advocate for a more centralized state. The second sort of *ethnie* might usefully be described as both “vertical” and “demotic” and is “generated in “popular” opposition to an oppressive state.”¹⁶ The strength of Smith’s argument is the emphasis he places on critical roles played by both religious and secular intelligentsia in nationalist movements.¹⁷ It is the second type of *ethnie* that may be used in some ways to explore the connection between nationalism and religion, especially in the Kurdish case. Hutchinson also offers similar insights on how nationalists filter the past into the present. If Hutchinson’s reading is followed, the distinctions between nationalist and revivalist Muslim becomes much fuzzier, especially when he declares that

[R]evivalism faces both ways, recognising that ‘tradition’ must be reconstituted – not destroyed – as the basis of political action and, at the same time, that societies must innovate. In this way nationalists effect change by mediating between the constituent

¹⁵ Cf. Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism : A Cultural Approach*(London ; New York: Routledge, 2009); John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism : The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*(London ; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987); *Nations as Zones of Conflict*(London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2005).

¹⁶ David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism: Tomorrow's Ancestors*, International Library of Sociology (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998)15.

¹⁷ Cf. Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, Ethnonationalism in Comparative Perspective (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991).

identities of populations rather than by enforcing a vision from above. Moreover, although nationalists are able to achieve political hegemony and establish their own collective myths of legitimacy, they do so on an already layered past, which retains its potentiality for later reactivation.¹⁸

The ethno-Symbolist theorists assign a vital importance to the role of the past and its continuity, claiming that the era of modern nationalism would not be possible without it. Therefore Smith argues that no nation existing today could be without their “navel” in the past.¹⁹ However, the ethno-symbolism approach is fundamentally problematic. Zubrzycki rightly notes “that there is no necessary continuity between *ethnies* and modern nations, although – and this is key – such continuity is retrospectively constructed and reinforced in nationalist discourse and narratives.”²⁰

The embedded supposition of the continuity of the nation makes the ethno-symbolism approach seriously flawed. This is the case since the modern form of conceptualizing the nation has no precedent in pre-modern eras. It is true that nationalism generally invokes ethnicity and the past. Nationalists claim that the nation is essentially perennial, defending a never-disrupted continuity of the nation. Nonetheless, such invocations are more a reconstruction and re-appropriation of the past necessitated by the present nationalist discourse.²¹ In Gellner’s words, “nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and most often transforms them radically.”²² Before the age of nationalism, ethnicity, and religion have hardly been used as the bases for the

¹⁸ Hutchinson, *Nations as Zones of Conflict*, 74.

¹⁹ For an extensive debate over this notion between Anthony Smith and Ernest Gellner see, Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac, *When Is the Nation? : Towards an Understanding of Theories of Nationalism*(London ; New York: Routledge, 2005).

²⁰ Geneviève Zubrzycki, "Religion and Nationalism; a Critical Re – Examination," in *The Sociology of Religion* ed. Bryan S. Turner(Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 609.

²¹ Abbas Vali, *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, Kurdish Studies Series (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 1-13.

²² Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 55.

legitimacy of what Anderson terms as ‘imagined communities.’²³ The community’s self-perception and imagination as one endowed with the collective right to statehood is modern. In the modern era, at least theoretically, certain collective distinctions are perceived as merely self-evident. This inherent and self-sufficient quality is assumed to engender inalienable political rights. In pre-modern eras, different communities may have regularly differentiated themselves from their Others. Such differences may have also constituted the basis of their claims to cultural or religious superiority. However, this type of collective self-referentiality could not turn into an ideological pursuit to make “the political and the national... congruent.”²⁴

It must also be noted that this study particularly benefits from a synthesized interpretation of works by Partha Chatterjee and Michael Billig. I have liberally employed concepts such as “derivativeness” and “the paradigmatic nature” of nationalism, since I became convinced that these concepts could offer theoretical bases for situating a possible nexus between religion and nationalism within socio-historical contexts.²⁵

When Billig defines national identity as “an identity [that] is to be found in the embodied habits of social life” and as “habits [that] include those of thinking and using language,”²⁶ “religion,” whatever its definition, cannot be excluded from this ascription. Religion too can be considered as part and parcel of “the habits of social life.” Religious identity can also function as one of the “forgotten reminders” of difference – *it is a reminder of difference*. If, in a community, “us” versus “them” originates from religious difference with another, such a

²³ See, Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

²⁴ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.

²⁵ Cf. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*. Also, Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*.

²⁶ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 8.

difference can constitute the distinguishing characteristic of those communities. Moreover, if such premises have any basis in reality, then it is sound to infer that: a) any religious utterance for demanding certain national rights is nationalistic, and by the same token can be located within the modern nationalist paradigm; and likewise, b) whatever other identities an agent may possesses (that is, religious or otherwise), such identities do not hinder the declaration of her/his “own” national identity. They will rather accommodate and become harmonious with other identities. This can be the case at both the individual as well as the collective level. Therefore, if a nationalist is religious, s/he may also attempt to either justify his/her nationalism religiously or to diminish her/his religious identity. Such an attempt does not have to be out of bad faith, to use Sartre’s phrasing,²⁷ since *the religious/nationalist agent may very well be blindsided by acting within the paradigm*. Nationalist paradigms, like any other paradigms, could very well be invisible to the agent living or operating within its domains. What Billig identifies as “banal nationalism” signifies the pervasiveness and the un-thought aspect of nationalism, such that one “always seems to locate nationalism on the periphery.”²⁸ This, in turn, illustrates the non-reflective aspects of the nationalist’s thoughts due to the impact of the prevailing paradigm.

Of course, nationalist beliefs are not always held without self-reflection. Nationalism seems to remain effective in rendering the nation-state inevitable or even natural, which makes it something that is “taken for granted.” For a religious/nationalist agent, this juncture can become reality, at least in two instances. In the first, “religion” becomes the major marker of identity, and a religious community demands its own sovereignty to delink itself from its Other – religious or otherwise. This may be derived from a lack of common religion or from ethnic and linguistic

²⁷ Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York,: Washington Square Press, 1971).

²⁸ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 5.

differences. In recent history, the Irish and the Croats have striven for sovereign states, which exemplify this first case. In the second case, a religious agent may downplay her/his common religious bond by calling into question the correctness of the ethnic-other's religious views to justify her/his self-differentiation, despite the commonality of religious bonds. Furthermore, individuals may decide not to forsake their own religious faith, but may blur common religious bonds with their coreligionists, simply by highlighting other markers of their own identity. The Kurdish pursuit of a state in the late 19th and early 20th centuries falls into this second category.

Like that of Billing's, Chatterjee's works also offers ways of shedding light on the intersections of religion and nationalism. While the role of religion in nationalist discourse is not Chatterjee's main focus, he still explains how religion comes to affect the anti-colonial-nationalist imagination of the nation. In his criticism of Anderson's claim that nationalism is a type of universalist "modular form" originating from Europe, Chatterjee argues that anti-colonial nationalism(s) "are posited not on an identity but on a difference with the 'modular' forms of the national society propagated by the modern West."²⁹ In Chatterjee's view, it is a misconception to see anti-colonial nationalism as mimicry of the West. Such a misconception, he tells us, stems from the fact that nationalism is merely reduced to a political movement.³⁰ It is the cultural self-reliance and rejection of the colonial spiritual culture that is the ground for anti-colonial and nationalist self-differentiation. Anti-colonial nationalism acknowledges Western material superiority – of the economy, state craft, and science and technology – and yet it insists on preserving "the distinctness of one's spiritual culture."³¹

²⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. 6 ibid., 6.

Like Billig, Chatterjee holds that the nation can be imagined in variety of ways. He considers the “inner domain of national culture” to be the locus of the national imagination’s birth, which takes place as a result of profound transformations within that domain. For Chatterjee, the inner domain of national culture is where the nationalist agent’s creativity brings forth a project of historical significance. Such creativity unfolds when nationalists attempt “to fashion a ‘modern’ national culture that is nevertheless not Western.”³² Fashioning a “modern” national culture unveil the existence of myriad possibilities, rather than an historical inevitability. Whatever the scope of cultural transformation may be, is it possible to think that it results in a complete removal of religion(s) and religiosity? If “religion” is expurgated from national culture, what does the existence of a religious minority and majority entail? What happens to a religion which provides a significant resource – perhaps along with other resources – for the “inner domain of the nationalist culture”? Is religion transformed like other components of a culture? Is it simply excluded with no resistance or no impact on national unity? How much “religion,” itself being part and parcel of the socio-cultural, influence nationalist discourse? If it does, to what extent does religion contribute to the multiplicity of the “modern”? How do religious adherences affect the politico-juridical standing of citizens under the secular nation-state?³³ If the womb of the old national culture is capable of delivering many children (or forms of imagination), is the birth of a religious one impossible? The above questions are posed in light of Chatterjee’s major insight. By illustrating how reinterpretations of the past shape the

³² Ibid.

³³ The Turkish juridical system greatly exemplifies of the influence of religion thought on nationalism. The Turkish state has historically known for the adaptation of a form of laïcité. Yet, the Turkish laws differentiate citizens based on their religious adherences. For instance, the concept of minority legally comes to be understood as a religious minority. The national education programs teach Islam in the state-sanctioned schools. Yet, these schools only teach *Sunni, Hanafī* version of Islam to which the Turkish ethnic majority adheres. All the *Sunni Imams* and clerics are trained and appointed by the nationalist- ‘secular’ state.

nationalist discourse, the role of “religion” becomes clear, as a factor within the ensuing power distributions and the structures of the nation.

There is broad agreement over the importance of the past and its reinterpretation for the nationalist project among theorists of nationalism - a past in which “religion” is present and alive.³⁴ If religion had an impact in shaping the nation’s past, its role in informing the nation’s present cannot be overlooked. There is a broad consensus among the theorists of nationalism on the fact that the cultural past significantly affects the present nationalist discourse. For instance, Homi Bhabha’s “narrated nation” is, in a sense, a presently celebrated past in the making. In Bhabha’s reading, the nation is both fictional and real. It is *fictional* since it did not exist as it is being narrated, and it is a *reality* since it is being narrated, functioning, and currently affecting our lives. The narrated nation is not what it was but what it is supposed to be. This type of narration resembles Chatterjee’s notion of “classization,” by which, as mentioned earlier, he means a form of “imagining of the nation [that is] endowed with a past.” In this way, in an effort to serve current objectives, nationalist agent utilizes the past in order to filter it into the present. A past that many modernist scholars use to assume to be merely “the universe of *homo religiosus*.”³⁵

The above approaches provide some important theoretical tools for making sense of the role religions play in nationalist struggles – anti-colonial and otherwise. It is important to (re)emphasize that religion is a component of national culture, and a resource to be utilized. It creates clearer boundaries between communities, especially in cases where the religious beliefs of the Other differ from those of the nationalists. Religion can be reinterpreted to become a

³⁴ Cf. Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, Leonard Hastings Schoff Memorial Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 3-25.

³⁵ Cf. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion* (New York,: Harcourt, 1959).

differential factor. It can be salient or neutral. It can also give an edge to the nationalist struggle or can be used to neutralize such struggles. This has been true in the case of Muslim relationships with Britain in the early decades of the 20th century. The emphasis here is on the interpretability and presence of religions in nationalist movements. It is the openness and potential for reinterpretation of religions that create the means for nationalism to freely and effortlessly make its way into religious thought. Religious reforms, whether undertaken by state or non-state agents, are the results of religious reinterpretations and reflect religious adaptation to newer cultural and political environments. Reinterpretations – scale and degree notwithstanding – are also continual. Thus, if religious reinterpretations take place within the nationalist paradigm, they must carry their birthmark. As such, nationalism as the context of religious interpretations and reforms forces religious thought to ameliorate or to make it compatible with nationalist thinking.

The persistence of the influence of religion does not just serve as a component of national cultural baggage inherited from the past. It rather shapes nationalist discourse through the composition of the national elite, their degree of religiosity, and their adherence to the religions of majority or minority groups. Even if the nationalist state strives to appear neutral to the religious composition of the nation, religion finds various vantage points for reappearance as national culture goes through transformations. The state, for its creation, requires hegemony and consent, and for this consent to become a reality, the nationalist elite will have to consider communal desire in its reform agenda. And this points to the limitations of the national state in excluding religion. Even the colonial state has recognized such limits to its power. Therefore, it has to make exceptions to its “universalist” claims, which in turn provide the ground for the possibility of “new forms of the modern state.”³⁶ This is how the nation – both as a community

³⁶ Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, 13.

and as a state – can be imagined in various and fragmentary forms.

Additionally, laws written, proposed, enacted, and interpreted by human beings with their own individuated religious beliefs may provide the opportunity for privatized and marginalized religion to exert its force on the greater population in the guise of secular law. This is not to say that, in Asad’s words, “religious discourse in the political arena is seen as a disguise for political power.”³⁷ The two cannot be effectively separated, not only because the modern secular state was built on the framework of religious power and law, but also because institutional discourse cannot be separated from the individuals on whom it exerts its power.

In reading Chatterjee’s works, one can discern that religion or religions have been filtered into Indian nationalist discourse on two levels. According to Chatterjee, the Indian nationalists initially tried to downplay their religious differences in the face of colonial presence. As such, they attempted to (re)define the national (or “our” religions) by including Islam in the mix, as opposed to the religion of the colonial power.³⁸ However, in the second phase, as colonial power became physically absent, local religious differences once again resurfaced.³⁹ This politico-religious configuration inspires Chatterjee, contra Anderson, to claim that the nation can go through an existentially “heterogeneous time.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Peter van der Veer contends that “[e]xcept for those of the Marxist left, Indian dreams of the nation always take religion as one of the main aspects of national identity.”⁴¹ He also asserts that “an important part of the political

³⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 29.

³⁸ See, Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Chapter 4.

³⁹ See, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, 3-25.

⁴⁰ See the interesting debate between Ambedkar and Gandhi over the issue of the universal and unequal citizenship in *ibid.*

⁴¹ Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism : Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 23.

discourse of the Congress party depends on the Gandhian legacy, which stands..., in the Hindu discursive tradition. This political discourse is not secular... it imagines a common ethnic culture of India in terms of religious pluralism.”⁴²

Neither nationalism nor religion(s) can be studied in isolation. Religious interpretation, as a phenomenon, is just another human interpretation that is affected by its context. Despite the elements of continuity in religious thought, such contextual influences transform religious interpretation and mark it with the specificity of its more recent contexts. In some ways, the Muslim Philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877 –1938) acknowledges that the continuity of religious element that owes its very existence to the adaptation to the newer paradigmatic requirements. He asserts that “the task before the modern Muslim is, therefore, immense. He has to rethink the whole system of Islam without completely breaking with the past.”⁴³ However, such a rethinking is not homogeneous and bears the mark of interaction with specific socio-historical contexts. Hence, religious thought in the era of nationalism must be affected by its context as much as it affects the context itself. This dialectic manifests as reciprocity and mutual entanglement. In this study, I aim to show the entanglements and reciprocities of nationalism and religious thought as it played out in the Ottoman context in the following order.

In the first chapter, I attempt to demonstrate the nexus between religious thought and nationalism. I argue that theorists of nationalism like Gellner and sociologist Liah Greenfeld are unpersuasive in their respective claims that the emergence of nationalism reduces religions to mere cultural symbols or a private relation between “man and his creator.” I also devote a large portion of the chapter to establish that “Islamism” is unable to think in terms of a political system

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*(?: Oline Free Books, 1930), 111-12.

beyond the nation-state. As such, Islamists appears to have internalized the political boundaries imposed by nation-state. Such internalization, in turn, affects Islamism's definition of *umma* and similar 'universalistic' concepts.

In chapters two, I briefly address the historical debate over the concept of caliphate. I argue that crucial Islamic concepts such as caliphate should be understood in their context. The caliphate can only be understood in relation to its time and place. Similarly, in the late 19th and 20th century, caliphate politics should be studied in the context of the rise of nationalism and anti-colonialism. The Islamic faith, as commonly claimed, did not become a hindrance to the Muslim ethnic self-consciousness. Therefore, in chapter three I question the idea of 'the latency of Turkish nationalism.' Such claims clearly ignore the Ottoman state's practice and its official nationalism. To back my theoretical discussion in chapter three, I devote a great portion of the subsequent chapter to the textual analysis of the Ottoman state records and contemporary literature in the late 19th and early 20th century.

In addition to the theories of nationalism, I make a use of Critical Discourse Analysis when I examine these documents. I employ these documents to reconstruct the contextual backgrounds of the constitutional recognition of Turkish as the Ottoman official language. In parallel, I use these documents to build on the works of scholars such as Ussama Makdisi and Selim Deringil to argue that Ottoman Islam was both exclusionary and universalist. Ottoman Islam was exclusionary, as it was becoming increasingly Turkified as the state concentrated on the Turkification of the language and the state bureaucracy. Ottoman Islam exhibited universalist tendencies in the periphery when the state employed Islam to induce needed loyalty to the center for combating colonialism and non-Turkish nationalist developments. Therefore, the idea of

Islamic unity, or Pan-Islam, should be also understood in the context of the Ottoman state and the elite's dual approach to Islam.

In chapter five, I examine a number of the unexplored writings of Kurdish intellectuals in the Ottoman papers of 1880. The late-19th century writings of Kurdish intellectuals provide us with a rare window into Kurdish Muslims' ethno-nationalist consciousness, offering an exceptional illustration of their fears and hopes. These writings underscore the Kurdish intelligentsia's efforts to make a case for the primordial existence of their own distinct nation. Hence, this chapter functions as a prelude to chapter six's analysis of Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nehri and his revolt in 1880. These particular writings serve as a unique source for understanding the political circumstances present during the time of Sheikh Ubeydullah's revolt.

To analyze his religio-political nationalism, I mainly devote chapter six to the Sheikh's own writings. His writings present one of the major sources for understanding the nexus between Islam and Kurdish nationalism. It is evident that Ubeydullah eagerly sought an independent Kurdish state. The Sheikh's conception of the state, though, is rather vague. Nonetheless, like many modern Islamic revivalists he viewed the state as the main agent for change. Such an approach is one of the major characteristics differentiating the modern from the pre-modern and medieval forms of Islamic revivalism. In general, modern Muslim revivalist movements are engrossed with obtaining the state control. This obsession with the state signifies the degree in which Muslims have been influenced by the modern nationalist socio-political context.

Typically, the state also had a central place in Sheikh Ubeydullah's religio-political project. The Sheikh ascribed great value to the role of the state in educating the populace. He did not view the state only as a guarantor of security and law and order. The Sheikh perceived the state as the instrument for the spread of his Kurdish-centered "true Islam." Yet, his interest in

reviving and spreading his true Islam only occurred within the limited ethnic and geographic boundaries of Kurdistan. The Sheikh's emphasis on defining Islam within the ethno-national boundaries of his imagined Islamic state showcases the rise of nationalism in Muslim societies and the way it shaped Muslim political thought.

Chapter seven sheds light on some aspects of the debates over Caliphate among the Kurds and the Turks in the first quarter of the 20th century. In chapter seven, I analyze the pre-exile writings of Said Nursi. His writing exemplifies the reciprocal influence of Islamic thought and nationalism. Such reciprocity becomes evident in Nursi's thought when he admits that nationalism is a reality in the Muslim world. He even praises nationalism and perceives what he calls "positive nationalism," as uplifting and a force for the refinement of human character and morality. To Nursi, so called positive nationalism raises the true spirit of collective bonds present among the member of the community and 'supplants the pre-national selfishness.'⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Cf. Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 189.

Chapter 1

Nationalism and Religious Thought

How to tell tale of “*Din*”⁴⁵ and fatherland.
No words I have on this difficult stand.
So do not take ill if due to your ways,
I cherish to revive the good old days.
- Muhammad Iqbal⁴⁶

The nation [is one of the] most untheorized concepts of the
modern world.
- Partha Chatterjee⁴⁷

No religion is true. A religion can only become true,
i.e. correspond to that which it gives itself out to be and is
taken to be.
- Karl Barth⁴⁸

We wanted to serve Iran by employing Islam and Mr.
Khomeini wanted to serve Islam by employing Iran.
- Mehdi Bazargan⁴⁹

National consciousness, as a “type” of consciousness, is articulated through the use of a unique idiom that was absent in pre-national political language. Life within the nationalist paradigm imposes a modern mode of conceiving of the nation and that enables nationalist agents to employ nationalist idiom to explain their affiliation with the nation.⁵⁰ In modern religious thinking the nation is perceived to be self-evident: since the religious agent operates within the

⁴⁵ Islam; religious faith.

⁴⁶ Muhammad Iqbal, *Armaghan-I Hijaz* (1938), <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/>.

⁴⁷ Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, xi.

⁴⁸ Garrett Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination : The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 151.

⁴⁹ The first Prime Minister after the revolution, Mehdi Bazargan, *Inqlab-E Iran Dar Do Harakat/ the Iranian Revolution in Two Opposing Directions* (Tehran: Mazaheri, 1983), 75.

⁵⁰ For an insightful discussion on this see, Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

paradigm of nationalism, s/he is inclined to unite her/his religious idiom with that of nationalism. Therefore, the paradigm imposes its requirements on religious interpretations, and it functions as a context for rethinking religion and affects its scopes and limits.

Such paradigmatic requirements should be thought of as a major ground for the fusion of religions and nationalism. Thusly modern Muslims' eagerness to find examples of democratic forms of governing in the golden age of Islam should be seen in this context. In turn, their attempts to reconstruct the religious past may be more inclined to make the past compatible with the modern state rather than an enthusiasm for the re-introduction of 'the original Islam.'⁵¹ Therefore, in many instances neither nationalism nor religion(s) can be studied in isolation.

A significant body of scholarship on nationalism tends to overlook the complex and reciprocal relationship⁵² between religion and nationalism – informing us that if there has been any direct relationship between the two, it has been ephemeral. In fact, if any connection between religion and nationalism is to be made, *it is only when religions are no longer*

⁵¹ A great illustration of this tendency is the following passage by al-Ṣaʿīdī:

When we consult the present, the historical past and the age of the four righteous caliphs, it becomes clear to us after careful study that *the prevailing political system at that time observed - to a large degree -- the principle of the separation of powers*. Legislation in that era was entrusted to "the body of jurists who exercised independent legal judgment." The caliph, as head of state, was not a specialist in the Sharīʿa; instead, *his function was limited -- primarily -- to legal execution and to administration*. It was the judges who possessed independent power. The caliph and his governors were subject to it, just as was every other individual (emphasis added).

Quoted in Al-Tashrīʿ wa-sann al-qawānīn fī al-dawla al-Islāmīya, dirāsa taḥlīlīya [Legislation and the Enactment of Laws in the Islamic State: An Analytical Study], (Cleveland: Dār al-nahḍa al-Islāmīya, 1992) 46-55.

⁵² It must be pointed out that there is a growing interest in the nexus between nationalism and religion. However, the literature seldom attends to the impact of nationalism on religious thought. Cf. Philip W. Barker, *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe: If God Be for Us* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009). , Anthony W. Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). ; Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Jason Nice, *Sacred History and National Identity: Comparisons between Early Modern Wales and Brittany*, *Religious Cultures in the Early Modern World* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009). Veer, *Religious Nationalism : Hindus and Muslims in India*.

religions.⁵³ It has to be at “[t]he point of transition [of religion] from faith to culture.”⁵⁴ Major theorists of nationalism have tended to assume that modern nationalism is secular by necessity. Gellner informs us that “In the industrialized world high cultures prevail, but they need a state not a church, and they need a state each. That is one way of summing up the emergence of the nationalist age.”⁵⁵ Resistance to assertions that nationalist discourses could spill into the domains of religious thought (or vice-versa) stems from the belief that religion was/is unable to penetrate the confines of modern nationalism.

According to Steven Grosby, however, the relation between the two “is historically and conceptually complicated. Religion has both been integral to, and at odds with, the formation and continuation of nations. An understanding of this relation requires a determination of how it varies from one religion to another, thereby entailing a comparative analysis.”⁵⁶ In many nationalist movements, some sort of religious influence or presence is palpable, yet the functions and the role of religion or religious interpretation in shaping nationalist discourse (or vice versa) seldom becomes the focus of scholarly investigations of nationalist movements. This is partly because of the prevalence of some type of teleological approach to the emergence of nationalism that is usually viewed as an “order creating system” that replaced or supplanted religion from the public space. In such approaches to religion, the presence of nationalism is generally equated with the absence of religion, and in many instances such an “absenting” of religion derives from a definition of religion that removes it from socio-historical contexts. If some scholars, such as

⁵³ Cf. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 42.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 72-3.

⁵⁶ Steven Elliott Grosby, *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 80.

Talal Asad and Katherine Ewing, have questioned “transhistorical” and “translocal” definitions of religion,⁵⁷ the dominant trend in nationalism studies relies on static conceptions of religion and defines nationalism as being entirely bereft of religiosity. In the words of Clifford Geertz, “the religious perspective...is everywhere the same.”⁵⁸ Thus, the dominant (and separate) approaches to the study of religion(s) and nationalism make an examination of the reciprocal influences of nationalism and religion an elusive one. As Asad, in his criticism of Geertz, has shown us, at the core of the dominant modern conceptualization of religion lies “privatized” Christianity.⁵⁹

This being said, an examination of the existing literature on religion and on nationalism suggests that the ways in which modern Christianity has come to be understood affects the conceptualization of the relationship between religion and nationalism. Scholarship positing secularism’s Western, Christian origins, for example, implies that nationalism (like secularism) erupted from the salvational bosom of a dying (or already dead) Christianity.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the “nationalist ethos” is linked directly to Protestantism.⁶¹ At the same time, the “academic study of religion has drawn heavily on the Western traditions of scholarship. This tradition has been

⁵⁷ See, Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, 27-54; Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam*(Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁵⁸ Quoted in Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, 47.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Liah Greenfeld writes:

[S]ecularization must be traced back to that last heroic burst of religious energy in the history of Christianity. At the same time, this momentous trend, which was to reduce the central issue of man’s eternal salvation to the relatively inconsequential and marginal sphere of lifestyle, did not result solely or even chiefly from inner religious developments and schisms. Its independent sources were *the same ones that nourished nascent nationalism*, and nationalism itself eventually emerged as the most important factor in its growth (emphasis added).

Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*(Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 100.

⁶¹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 42.

influenced by the post-Enlightenment separation between church and state.”⁶² Ostensibly, the modern understanding of Western Christianity informs the general conception of religion, wherein religion is understood as a timeless phenomenon with no cultural context. Within the academy, this translated into the influential 19th and 20th century discipline of comparative religion, wherein religiosity was seen as wholly “other,” while personal religious experience constituted “the essence of ‘religion’ and the common core of the world’s ‘religions.’”⁶³ Such approaches to the study of religion(s) increasingly “privileged what was supposedly the higher mystical essence of the religion in question over and above the exoteric tradition.”⁶⁴ However, this hierarchy is beginning to teeter, with recent scholarship’s questioning of the unitary and universalist understanding of religion(s).

This emergent body of critical scholarship locates the genesis of previous literature within the context of European identity formation,⁶⁵ where the effort to define religion with universalistic traits is understood as manifesting a European self-perception “as a prototype of unity amidst plurality, Europe as a marker for the subject position of universal history.”⁶⁶ And the idea of religion that emerges from this European sense of self is marked (perhaps indelibly)

⁶² Gerrie ter Haar and Yoshio Tsuruoka, eds., *Religion and Society: An Agenda for the 21st Century*, International Studies in Religion and Society, (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007), xiii.

⁶³ Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3.

⁶⁴ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 91n.

⁶⁵ Cf. Ibid. Also, Derek R. Peterson and Darren R. Walhof, *The Invention of Religion : Rethinking Belief in Politics and History*(New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

⁶⁶ Tomoko Masuzawa, "Theory without Method: Situating a Discourse Analysis on Religion," in *Religion and Society: An Agenda for the 21st Century*, ed. Gerrie ter Haar and Yoshio Tsuruoka(Leiden ; Boston: Brill,, 2007), 182.

by Christianity. As Gil Anidjar puts it, Christianity granted this name to others, “the name [that] it had only ever attributed to itself, the very name of ‘religion.’”⁶⁷

In addition to its Eurocentric origin, the concept of religion is exclusionary and epistemically disruptive, such that the application of the term in studies of non-European religions has had a long-lasting impact on how they came to be understood. As Chin Hong Chung argues, the introduction of the term has resulted in a cognitive disruption in the study of non-European religions, and with the straitjacket of “religion” in place, one can refer to “religion-before religion and religion-after religion.”⁶⁸

In the 20th century, celebrated Western scholars of religion – such as Mircea Eliade and Huston Smith – defined “religion” as possessing an immutable essence. In many instances it was asserted that the universe of religious people remains static, with oral traditions being given the attribute of immutability. Religions were conceived as existing along a continuum, with “advanced” religions with sacred texts being contrasted with religions devoid of scriptures, and being considered to be closer to nature – that is, they were more attuned to natural religion.

Speaking to this effect, Smith contends that “[if his] God does not evolve, neither, it seems, does *homo religiosus*, not in any important respect.”⁶⁹ In more recent scholarship on religion, such hierarchical views are being reversed. It is now argued that the traditional hermeneutic, with its fixation on unchanging texts, is flawed. The major inadequacy of standard hermeneutics, argues Sylvia Marcos, derives from its fixed views and its inability to capture the

⁶⁷ Gil Anidjar, *Semites : Race, Religion, Literature*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 46.

⁶⁸ Cf. Chin Hong Chung, "Religion-before Religion and Religion-after Religion: Reshuffled Rest," in *Religion and Society: An Agenda for the 21st Century*, ed. Gerrie ter Haar and Yoshio Tsuruoka (Leiden ; Boston: Brill,, 2007).

⁶⁹ Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 307.

constant change in “oral traditions.”⁷⁰ The “methods used for systematizing religions rooted in the sacred’ and other texts will lead to distortions and misinterpretations,”⁷¹ since “oral traditions are essentially fluid, flexible and malleable.”⁷²

Eurocentric Context of the Study of Nationalism

It is not an overstatement to say that the modern understanding of religion – vis-à-vis Christianity, as described above – has fundamentally affected studies of nationalism. Greenfeld’s assertion “that the nature of nationalism is never determined by the religious context in which it may grow”⁷³ is a pertinent illustration, as she essentially characterizes religion as mere “exigencies of salvation and the responsibility [of man] before his Creator that each man must meet alone.”⁷⁴ Beyond that, we are told, all “the tensions in men’s social relations, which agitate peculiarly social passions and anxieties – status-anxiety, the concern for dignity, recognition, and one’s place among others – all that, in short, [is what] religion dismisses as vanity.”⁷⁵ Such remarks, perhaps unintentionally, deny the possibility of multiple interpretations of the Christian Bible or of the idea of salvation. Further, religion becomes utterly ineffective and irrelevant to modern life, if the social “secular consciousness” is considered as the only determining factor in human relations. The assumed universality of religion and its immutable essence relegates it to a

⁷⁰ Sylvia Marcos, "Theory and Method in the Study of Religions," in *Religion and Society an Agenda for the 21st Century*, ed. Gerrie ter Haar and Yoshio Tsuruoka (Leiden ; Boston: Brill,, 2007), 217.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*, 105.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Greenfeld’s characterization of religion as fundamentally against man’s “dignity” is a gross generalization that has little bearing on religious traditions. For example, the Qur’an (translated by Khalifa) informs the believers that “(they should know that) all dignity belongs to GOD and His messenger, and the believers.” (63/8).

place *outside of modern daily life*. And it does this because of the assumption that the emergence of *homo nationalis*⁷⁶ signifies the disappearance of religious since nationalism, Greenfeld claims, is “the framework of the modern social consciousness,”⁷⁷ or, in Taylor’s words, it is a product of “a purely secular time”⁷⁸ – whatever that might mean. Religion is thus understood as a phenomenon that contains, attracts, and includes only itself within itself, and is necessarily devoid of any element of nationalist thought, as it would contaminate it.

If “religion” takes the form of nationalist expression, some prominent theorists tell us that it is no longer “religion” – it loses its essence. Gellner, for instance, claims that in the age of nationalism religion fades into culture, which he claims to be “undefinable.”⁷⁹ However, Gellner’s apparent refusal to define culture should not be interpreted as his belief in the further continuity of religion in a different form. He informs us that nationalists want “a state not a church.” Additionally, Gellner lacks consistency in his refusal. For instance, he refers to culture as a “language” – albeit “provisionally”⁸⁰ – as a “shared system of communication and norms.” Also, he considers culture as the distinguishing characteristic of the nation, when he stresses that “[t]wo men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture.” So, the compelling

⁷⁶ The terms is borrowed from Balibar in: Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class : Ambiguous Identities*(London England ; New York: Verso, 1991), 93. Also, Ruth Wodak and others, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, Critical Discourse Analysis Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

⁷⁷ Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*, 105.

⁷⁸ Charles Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," in *Theorizing Nationalism*, ed. Ronald Beiner(Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 227.

⁷⁹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 43.

⁸⁰ “Culture,” Gellner states is “an elusive concept [and] was deliberately left undefined. But an at least provisionally acceptable criterion of culture might be language, as at least a sufficient, if not a necessary touchstone of it.” *Ibid.*, 43-44.

question is, if we ignore religion, what is it exactly that differentiates Irish nationalist Protestants from Catholics or Croats from Serbs?⁸¹

Greenfeld contends that those who invoke religion within the confines of their nationalist discourse are ignorant to the otherworldly nature of “true religion.” It is for this reason that she claims that “Most religious nationalisms are ethnic nationalisms” and they “are more often than not predicated on the essential worldliness of this complex of sentiments[of the fusion of nationalism and religion], *expressed most tellingly in the inattention to, even ignorance, and disregard of basic religious (transcendental) principles.*”⁸² And so, yet again, religion is presented as being an ahistorical phenomenon that is uniform in its functionality – even though, to point to another seemingly obvious fact, religions have served, and continue to serve, all sorts of functions.

Among such functions, religions have provided the *conditions* of difference. It is thus a considerable generalization to assert, as John Coakley does, that “Unlike nationalism, the great religions are universalistic and transethnic.”⁸³ Such a reading decontextualizes religious meanings and religious interpretations. Greenfeld is correct in claiming that injustice, humiliation, and discrimination are the immediate causes for the saliency of religious identities and for self-differentiation from a religious or ethnic Other. Given that an identity-based reading of religion constitutes a ground for the religious reading to be entangled in and influenced by its socio-political context such a reading necessitates re-interpretations. That is why that to assume

⁸¹ Gellner states that “nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a *high* culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population.” Ibid., 57.

⁸² Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*, 111.(Emphasis added).

⁸³ John Coakley, "Religion and Nationalism in the First World," in *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism* ed. Daniele Conversi(London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 213.

religion is limited to the exigency of the relation between individual human being and God is problematic and this in and of itself is only one kind of modern interpretation of religion. In a similar vein, as René Rémond notes, “For a people who have been conquered, oppressed, subjected to foreign domination, especially if their faith is different from that of their oppressor, religion ensures the preservation of their personality and encourages awareness of their identity.”⁸⁴ From a slightly different angle, but still within the domain of “difference,” religious differences can also be a significant factor for collective conversions *to* or rejections *of* emerging religious beliefs. For, the very claim to absolute “truth,” which is not uncommon in religious discourses, provides sufficient ground for engendering difference.

To characterize modern consciousness or “imagination” as secular in its essence is to be as *fundamentalist* as it is to be essentialist – as such a characterization is to foreground a perspective and a history of a certain (Christian) religion that cannot be universalized. Moreover, such a take on religion-secularism itself a particular interpretation of religion, represents a categorical denial of the existence of more than one type of modern interpretation of religion.

In her reading of the premodern world, Greenfeld – who understands religion according to a particular religious prism – claims that, since religion was the only framework of social consciousness in medieval Europe, language never became a condition for difference.⁸⁵ However, it must be pointed out that the absence of a “linguistic identity” does not *prove* that religion was the only framework of social consciousness. The seemingly apolitical approach to language in Medieval Europe could, quite conceivably, have been related to the ways in which language was regarded, rather than religion. It also does not of necessity nullify the effect of

⁸⁴ Quoted in Barker, *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe: If God Be for Us*, 20.

⁸⁵ Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*, 98.

ethnic bonds or strong blood ties in pre-modern times. Muslims, for instance, in a short period of time after the Prophet Muhammad's death, became involved in one of the longest disputes between Arabs and non-Arabs in Muslim history. In these intra-Muslim contestations, in-group claims to ethnic and language superiority of Arabs over non-Arabs (or vice versa), were reflected even in the supposedly sacrosanct realms of Islamic jurisprudence and *hadith* literature (sayings attributed to the Prophet).⁸⁶

Religions, either in their fusion with the general culture or in their existence as mere "sacred texts," have never produced a universally uniform interpretation. Therefore, even if by religions only meant canonical religious texts, they would nevertheless *continually affect and be affected by* their context. That is why the decision to ignore a possible (and continual) reciprocal impact between religion and nationalism cannot be tenable. Like nationalism, religions are understood and adopted by living agents who are in constant interaction with their socio-political environment.

Similar to ethnicity and nationalism, "religion can [and must] be understood as a mode of social organization, a way of framing, channeling, and organizing social relations."⁸⁷ It is perhaps for this reason that, in spite of her ardent declaration that "the nature of a nationalism is never determined by the religious context," Greenfeld admits that nationalism is "often affected by [the religious] context to an extent, it is ultimately defined by the constraints of the immediate situations faced *by the social groups actively involved in the formation of the national*

⁸⁶ Cf. Ahmad Amin, *Duha Al-Islam/ the Sunrise of Islam*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (al-Qahirah: Jam'iyah al-Ri'aya al-Mutakamilah, 2003), 93-100.

⁸⁷ Rogers Brubaker, "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches," in *Nation/Religion* (Konstanz 2011 http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/brubaker/Publications/religion_and_nationalism_forthcoming.pdf), 4.

consciousness.”⁸⁸ And it is with this *ultimately definitive* aspect of nationalism that we must agree – for it always already includes religion.

Sacralization, Religion and Nationalism

“The sacred” is not synonymous with “religion,”⁸⁹ nor is nationalism simply encapsulated within “the profane.” Any thesis which requires a stark distinction between the sacred and the profane is unable to account for the complex relation between nationalism and religion. The assertion that the profane and sacred are mutually exclusive is the root of the problem, and one that gives rise to paradoxes. For instance, Greenfeld, a theorist who engages in this distinction, exemplifies such unresolvable paradoxes. She states that “[n]ationalism is an essentially secular form of consciousness, one that, indeed, sacralizes the secular.”⁹⁰ As indicated above, Greenfeld concedes that as a result of religious agents’ participation in the nationalist enterprise, religion to some extent influences nationalism. In turn, one is propelled to ask whether the religious agent loses her/his religious consciousness as s/he attains nationalist consciousness. Greenfeld asserts that nationalism, as a secular consciousness, is able to sacralize the secular. These remarks are worthy of attention for two reasons: First, despite the assumed immobility and clarity of the boundaries between the sacred the secular, nationalism (read “the secular” here) is still endowed with a “religious” or sacred power – that is, it has the ability to

⁸⁸ Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*, 105. (Emphasis added)

⁸⁹ Durkheim contends when “a certain number of sacred things sustain relations ... to form a system having a certain unity, but which is not comprised within any other system of the same sort, the totality of these beliefs and their corresponding rites constitutes a religion.” Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 39.

⁹⁰ Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*, 93.

sacralize. In her words, nationalism makes “the sacred emanate from the mundane.”⁹¹ If this is the case, it shows “how nationalism can take on the mantle of religion even in the most consciously modern of nation-states.”⁹² Thus, it validates a contention that considers nationalism a modern religion or an “iconography pervading the public and private sphere”⁹³ (notwithstanding such views’ inherent inadequacies and contradictions). Basically, the implication is that nationalism “is a religion – if not indeed the religion – of modern times.”⁹⁴

Secondly, staying with Greenfeld’s remarks that nationalism sacralizes the secular: At least in one type of post-Enlightenment perspective religion is perceived as nothing more than the beliefs and practices that revolve around the sacred. In the words of Durkheim, religion is “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to *sacred things*,⁹⁵ that is to say, things set apart and forbidden.”⁹⁶ Durkheim expands his definition by describing religion as “beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”⁹⁷ Thus, to define religion as “a unified system of beliefs” that sets apart sacred things could just as easily be applied to nationalism. The nation could also be a “sacred” thing that is set apart; for, in keeping with Durkheim’s definition of “religion,” the nation contains bonds that unite a community. The protection of the nation, as the source of values, engenders rituals and prohibitions through, what Billig calls, the daily flagging. This daily flagging or ‘narration’ that

⁹¹ Ibid., 96-8.

⁹² Gerd Baumann, *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*, Zones of Religion (New York: Routledge, 1999), 43.

⁹³ Hutchinson, *Nations as Zones of Conflict*, 135.

⁹⁴ Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class : Ambiguous Identities*, 95.

⁹⁵ Emphasis added.

⁹⁶ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 44.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

takes place banally recreates the nation daily. In this way its transcendental aspect is reasserted and becomes symbolic. And the nation's 'origin' is linked to its goal: statehood and its continuity.

A national community may also be considered a moral community. It can be so because it imposes all types of "shalls" and "shall nots" on those who become affiliated under its banner. When an American calls an act "un-American," the act is considered unpatriotic and in turn unethical. A patriot is expected and obliged to act otherwise. An un-American act is not necessarily illegal, but it is certainly immoral from the American nationalist perspective. Like other ethical obligations, nationalist or patriotic obligations appear to supersede the law and juridical boundaries. Nationalist obligations connote sacrifice and selflessness when the laws fall short, that is held to be based on a social contract. Of course, this would be all there is to the nation, even if we ignore Hegel when he asserts that "the state rests on the ethical sentiment, and that on the religious."⁹⁸

However, despite its wide acceptance, Durkheim's definition of religion remains rather vague. It is unable to separate any other sets of beliefs that sacralize things from the 'generic religion.' It is also unable to define what is sacred, since there exists no universal understanding of the sacred. Based on Durkheim's definition of religion, nationalism that "sacralizes the secular" or "any set of beliefs that focuses on the [arbitrarily designated] sacred, is a religion."⁹⁹ Such a definition cannot distinguish *homo nationalis* from *homo religiosus*, which, supposedly, "always believes that there is...the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this

⁹⁸ Quoted in Claude Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?," in *Political Theologies : Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 149.

⁹⁹ Philip W. Barker, *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe: If God Be for Us*, Routledge Studies in Nationalism and Ethnicity (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 10.

world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real.”¹⁰⁰ Not to mention the embedded assumption that “the secular” is self-evident, as whatever is non-religious.

It must be emphasized that religious views regarding the forbidden or the permissible, are in constant flux. Even smaller religious denominations within the larger sets of religions are unable to keep their boundaries intact. The conception of the sacred is similarly time bound and contextual. What is sacred at one point in history could be profane in another. What might be sacred for one denomination could be profane for another. “The sacred is simply what is *deemed* sacred by any group”¹⁰¹ For Twelver *Shi‘i* Muslims, the tombs of their Imams are among the holiest sites of Islam. To *Salafi* Muslims, however, the same sites are manifestly “idols,” the embodiment of the utmost profanity and the *only* unforgivable sin.¹⁰² Thus, the scopes and limits of secular objects and subjects are open to interpretation. Within these interpretations, there are constant shrinkages and expansions. Some religious interpretations might not leave any room for distinctions between the two. For instance, a Muslim could claim that “In Islam the *spiritual and the temporal are not two distinct domains*, and *the nature of an act, however secular in its import*, is determined by the attitude of mind with which the agent does it.”¹⁰³ Hence, it is one’s “attitude of mind” or the intent of the agent that determines what may be considered sacred or secular.

At the same time, there is no reason to believe that every religion will subscribe to the sacred-profane binary. Sacred and profane binaries occur in marked variability, but they can also

¹⁰⁰ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, 202.

¹⁰¹ William Paden, “Before “the Sacred” Became Theological: Durkheim and Reductionism,” in *Religion and Reductionism: Essays on Eliade, Segal, and the Challenge of the Social Sciences for the Study of Religion*, ed. Thomas A. Idinopulos and Edward A. Yonan (Leiden ; New York: E.J. Brill, 1994), 203. (Emphasis in the original)

¹⁰² The Qur’an 4/48 (translated by Khalifa): God does not forgive idolatry, but He forgives lesser offenses for whomever He wills.

¹⁰³ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 181. (Emphases added)

be entirely absent. For instance, in the case of pantheism the entire universe is considered to be synonymous with “God” or the “Supreme Principle.” Hence, no distinctions between the sacred and profane occur. In fact, the arbitrariness or the indeterminability of the secular and the sacred divide seems scandalously obvious. The sacred and the profane (or the secular) can be one and the same. The “soul” itself exemplifies one instance of an indiscriminable coexistence of the sacred and the profane in a religious text, such as the Qur’an. It has been described as follows: “The soul and Him who created it. And its inspirations to its evil and its good.”¹⁰⁴

For some Buddhists, “religion doesn’t require God.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, if the “absence of a personal Creator-God is atheism, Buddhism is atheistic.”¹⁰⁶ For a religious person, whose religion lacks God, the conception of the sacred is in no way commensurable with that of one who believes religion is essentially an otherworldly enterprise. This concern is quite prevalent in Confucianism. “Whenever he was questioned about other-worldly matters, Confucius drew the focus back to human beings.”¹⁰⁷ What about death and meeting the Creator, and so forth? Confucius would reply, “‘you do not understand even life. How can you understand death?’ In short: one world at a time.”¹⁰⁸

The instability of the sacred and the profane is reflected even in modern law. Many aspects of modern laws, especially with respect to marriage (for example, monogamy and polygamy), reflect substantial religious input. If it were not for their religious roots, some of these laws would not make much sense. This is why, despite his assumption about the inherent

¹⁰⁴ The Qur’an. 91/7&8

¹⁰⁵ Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions*, 114.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 185.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

non-religiosity of the modern, Eliade could not deny “that a drastically nonreligious experience of the whole of life is seldom found in the pure state, even in the most secularized societies.”¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, and quite significantly, religious agents are also conscious of the instability present in the boundaries of their religions. As Talal Asad recounts, “[t]he medieval Church was always clear about why there was a continuous need to distinguish knowledge from falsehood (religion from what sought to subvert it), as well as the sacred from the profane (religion from what was outside it).”¹¹⁰ Similarly, in Islamic history there have been frequent attempts to ‘purify Islam’ from the constant incursions from the socio-historical context. Such efforts often were concurrent strive to make religious thought more applicable and attuned to the newer contexts. If one were to make use of such terms, if only to illustrate the instability of such binaries, the Qur’an itself is understood by Muslims to have ‘desacralized’ things that were ‘sacred’ at some point, and ‘sacralized’ those things that were not at another. It did so as it abrogated (*manasukh*) some previous provisions, and declared their annulment with the introduction of newer ones (*nasikh*).

Muslims scholars— notwithstanding their divergences—have historically devised a number of theoretical tools which allow for the constancy of revival (*ihya*’), renewal (*tajdid*), and the reinterpretation or re-adjudication (*ijtihad*) of religious thought—all of which, in one way or another, problematizes the assumed stability of religious meaning. *Ijtihad*, for instance, is indicative of the unavailability of the precedent (in its juridical sense), or the lack of prior and pertinent interpretation. *Ijtihad* is seen to be a continuous interpretive attempt to make the ‘original’ meaning(s) applicable to newer contexts. In other words, it offers newer readings of

¹⁰⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, 186.

¹¹⁰ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, 39.

nas (canonical texts), to make them functional and relevant to their newer cultural and socio-historical environments. *Tajdid*, however, is an interpretive challenge that aims at the revival of the ‘original or primal’ meaning—a meaning that is lost due to the constant interpretive departures and deviations from the ‘original.’¹¹¹

In a sense, these concepts are complementary, even though, *tajdid* is less general and less frequent when compared with *ijtihad*. Nonetheless, their existence testifies to Muslims’ inadvertent admission of the mutating nature of religious meaning. It also illustrates their cognizance of the constant changes that occur between ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ spaces. Thus, such instabilities not only make the constancy of the assumed boundary between the sacred and profane untenable, they also show that religious agents are aware of the extent and unpredictability of religious meanings.

Setting aside the problematic nature of efforts at arbitrary universalization, such attempts could practically confuse religion and nationalism, rather than explain them. As some scholars have noted, there is a constant “process of sacralization,”¹¹² by which it is claimed that “the secular becomes sacred or other new forms of the sacred appear.”¹¹³ If both religion and nationalism are “a set of beliefs” that sacralize and profanize, what is the difference between

¹¹¹ Concepts such as *ihya*’ and *tajdid* have long roots in Muslim history. Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni (1028 – 1085), and Abū Hāmed al-Ghazālī (1058 – 1111) are considered the precursors in introducing those concepts. However, it was Jalaluddin Al-Suyuti (1445–1505) became the major exponent of these concepts. For Al-Suyuti’s discussion on this subject see, Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, *Kitab Al-Tahadduth Bini ‘Matillah*, ed. Elizabeth Marry Sarton (Cairo: al-Matba‘a al-Arabiyyah al-Haditha, 1972), 202-28.

¹¹² Barker, *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe: If God Be for Us*, 24.

¹¹³ Ibid.

them? If nationalism is capable of sacralization (read ‘irrationalization’), then how does it replace religion for its supposed ‘irrational’ and ‘premodern’ essence?¹¹⁴

Nationalism, then, itself becomes both ‘religious’ and ‘irrational,’ and espouses elements of what Eliade assumes to belong to “the primitive and oriental cultures;”¹¹⁵ and because the sacred, we are told, “is the prime obstacle” to the freedom of modern man, it requires a God.¹¹⁶ It is said that man “will not be truly free until he has killed the last god.”¹¹⁷ Also, “the most striking trait of premodern, pre-rational visions,” contends Gellner, was, of course, “the co-existence within them of multiple, not properly united, but hierarchically related sub-worlds, and the existence of special privileged facts, sacralized and exempt from ordinary treatment.”¹¹⁸ Hence, nationalism as a modern phenomenon is supposed to be one manifestation of the disappearance of ‘the sacred.’ Jeffery K. Hadden summarizes this teleological process as:

Once the world was filled with the sacred—in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernization swept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm.¹¹⁹

The secular is no longer secular if it sacralizes and possesses what it supposed to inherently lacking. It loses all attributes of the secular. Hence, how can nationalism replace religion if *it is itself religious and secular all at once*? Moreover, how can nationalism only exist within the realm of the secular even if it functions like Buddhism, as an ‘atheistic’ religion?

¹¹⁴ “The conception according to which the profane is opposed to the sacred, just as the irrational is to the rational, or the intelligible is to the mysterious, is ... one of the forms under which this opposition is expressed.” Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 39n.

¹¹⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, 178.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 203.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 21.

¹¹⁹ Jeffrey K. Hadden, "Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory," *Social Forces* 3, no. 65 (1987): 598.

Such confusions stem from perceiving either religion or nationalism as phenomena with universal essences, in which the latter is presumed to supplant the first all too naturally, where nationalism is seen to emerge with the demise or evaporation of religion. “Mainstream scholarship on nations and nationalism often points out that the emergence and rise of nationalism as an ideology is linked to the general trend of the secularization of society. [S]ome scholars have concluded that religion’s demise is responsible for the extent of nationalism’s success.”¹²⁰ Such views ignore the possibility of local interpretations of both religion and nationalism, and instead emphasize socio-historical contexts and the “derivative”¹²¹ nature of a ‘local’ (that is, non-Western) nationalism. In other words, “the functional equivalence of nationalism and religion is dubiously premised upon a historical narrative of the secularization of the West.”¹²² Therefore, it is assumed that modernity and related phenomena everywhere have a standard and similar impact on all religions. Peter Berger speaks to this reality when he declares that “[t]he big mistake, which I shared with everyone who worked in this area in the 1950s and 60s, was to believe that modernity necessarily leads to a decline in religion.”¹²³ So, the very expression of “the resurgence or the return of religion” signifies the dismay of witnessing the resurrection of religion by those who prematurely declared its death.

Modern Islamic Political Thought, “Islamism” and Nationalism

¹²⁰ Zubrzycki, "Religion and Nationalism; a Critical Re – Examination," 606-07.

¹²¹ I am using Chatterjee’s phrase here. See Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*.

¹²² Zubrzycki, "Religion and Nationalism; a Critical Re – Examination," 609.

¹²³ Quoted in Barker, *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe: If God Be for Us*, 5.

Islamic revivalism, notwithstanding its diverse historical forms, has generally possessed antithetical attitudes towards contemporary conceptualizations of Islam. Critiquing contemporary Muslims for their assumed distance from ‘the original Islam’ has constituted the core of Islamic revivalist claims. Such claims unintentionally validate the fact that religious interpretations are part of human endeavors that are always relative and contextual. Revivalist interpretations are not an exception to this rule. Nevertheless, modern forms of revivalism or “Islamism” claim that the original message, in its pure sense, is restorable. Hence, the claim to an exclusive access to the original meaning is embedded in Islamism.¹²⁴ Even the term fundamentalism—
notwithstanding its essentialist and pejorative identification—ironically takes the claim of returning to the original understanding of “the fundamentals” seriously. Overall, such approaches indicate the subtlety and pervasiveness of the belief in the non-contextual nature of religion(s).

Historically, religions have always been understood or interpreted in a variety of ways. The claim of different ethnic groups to being favored by God or being His chosen people, is only one amongst a multitude of ways of interpreting religion. Islamic religious thought is not an exception to this rule. Therefore, it is justified to claim that “[t]here are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain it.”¹²⁵ Talal Asad is right to contend that religion cannot be defined universally and “we [should] focus instead on how our subjects define religion.”¹²⁶ However, it is hard to agree with Asad when he claims that “although Islamism has virtually always succeeded Arab nationalism in the contemporary history of the Middle East, and addressed itself

¹²⁴ Cf. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 1st ed.(Karachi: International Islamic Publishers, 1981). Also, *The Islamic Concept and Its Characteristics*(Indianapolis IN, USA: American Trust Publications, 1991).

¹²⁵ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, Phronesis (London ; New York: Verso, 1993), 1.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*, 23.

directly to the nation-state, it should not be regarded as a form of nationalism.”¹²⁷ While Asad is correct in claiming that Islamism is not secular,¹²⁸ his inadvertent suggestion that “nationalism is essentially secular” is problematic.¹²⁹

Asad partly bases his argument on his own definition of the term *umma*, whose revival is assumed to be the ultimate goal of Islamism.¹³⁰ For Asad, the way in which the *umma* is conceived differentiates Islamism from a nationalist trend such as Arabism. Asad argues that Arabism imagines the *umma* as the Arab *umma* (*al-‘Arabiyye*)—a political community. He also states that this imagined political community is distinct from a “theologically defined space enabling Muslims to practice the disciplines of *dīn* in the world,”¹³¹ in the Medieval era. Asad’s reading, however, overlooks the historical impact of Arab nationalism and the nationalist tendencies present in the Arabo-Islamic revivalist reinterpretation of *umma*. It is true that Islamism has connections to “the tradition.” The tradition, however, to borrow Katherine Ewing’s phrasing, has passed through “the gaze of modernity.”¹³² In a way, it is justifiable to describe revivalist groups as those demanding “reinterpretation of the present through a *reevaluation and recreation of the past* that it fits within the modern context.”¹³³ Hence, the modern context in which these connections are made to “the tradition,” should not go unattended.

¹²⁷ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 199.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹²⁹ See, *ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 196-98.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹³² Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam*.

¹³³ Andrew Rippin and Jan Knappert, *Textual Sources for the Study of Islam*, Textual Sources for the Study of Religion (Manchester Greater Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 30. Emphasis added.

More importantly, ethnic self-differentiation has been largely embedded in Muslim Arab revivalism. Historically, Arab revivalist trends have perceived non-Arab Muslims as one of these causes for “decadence” or “degeneration” (*inhiṭat*) of Islam.¹³⁴ The non-Arab role in Islam is mostly explained in negative terms. The ethnic overtone of such explanations is evident as they attempt to tie the “impurity” of non-Arab Islamic comprehension to their ethnic character and to their history. For example, Muhammad ‘Abduh, the renowned Arab-Islamic revivalist had no qualms in stating that “since the Turks were late converts, they remained unable to grasp the spirit of Islam.”¹³⁵ He wrote that the Ottoman Turks’ rule “polluted the purity (*khulus*) of Arabic languages, which in turn led to discord and sectarianism amongst Muslims.”¹³⁶

In ‘Abduh’s mind, there is an organic tie between the Arabic language and Islam. The “degeneration” of the first, for ‘Abduh, caused “the decline” of the second. In his 1902 work, *al-Islam wa al-Nasraniyye*, ‘Abduh also claimed that “Islam [originally] was a religion of the Arabs.” However, an Abbasid Caliph’s decision “to create a foreign (*ajnabi*) army comprised of

¹³⁴ Even Muhammad Iqbal accepts the decadence (*inhiṭat*) of the Muslim World. In one of his poems titled “in the time of *inhiṭat*, conformity (*taqlid*) is better than *ijtihād*” states,

The present age has many tumults hid
Beneath its head; its restless temperament
Swarms with disorders. The society
Of ancient nations in these modern times
Is in confusion; sapless hangs life’s bough

...

Stability in strict conformity.
Go thou thy father’s road, for therein lies
Tranquility; conformity connotes
The holding fast of the community.
In time of Autumn, thou who lackest leaf
Alike and fruit, break never from the tree,

Muhammad Iqbal, *Rumuz-i Bekhudi* trans. Iqbal Academy Pakistan (Iqbal Academy, 1918). It should be noted that Iqbal writes the above poem in 1918. In his later works, Iqbal does not seem to have much regard for conformity. In his 1930 work, for instance, Iqbal states that “a false reverence for past history and its artificial resurrection constitute no remedy for a people’s *decay*” (emphasis added). See *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 203.

¹³⁵ Hamid ‘Enayat, *Seyri Dar Andishay-E Siyasi-Ye Arab/ a Alimpse at Arabic Political Thought* (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sohami-ye Kitabha-ye Jibi, 2536), 149.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Turks, Dailamites and other [non-Arab] people... alienated – or made foreign –Islam... transforming it into a non-Arab (‘*ajami*) [religion].”¹³⁷ ‘Abduh was not the only person to hold such views. Similar remarks are often made by other iconic revivalist figures, including Rashid Rida and Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi.¹³⁸ Even Hassan al-Banna (1906 – 1949), the founder of Muslim Brotherhood, states that “we are not denying that the various nations have their own distinct qualities and particular moral characters.... We believe that *in these respects Arabism possesses the fullest and most abundant share...*”¹³⁹

Asad also admits that *umma* can mean “a people.”¹⁴⁰ However, the term has more to it than what Asad calls “the sense of ‘a people’—‘a community’ in the Qur’an.”¹⁴¹ In the Qur’an, while the Muslim community is regarded as an *umma*, so is Ibrahim – a single human being also considered an *umma*.¹⁴² Likewise, a small group of Muslims,¹⁴³ of Jews,¹⁴⁴ and of Christians¹⁴⁵ (as opposed to their respective communities at large), are also designated by the term *umma*. The Qur’an sometimes uses the term to describe a religious tradition,¹⁴⁶ and sometimes for a community consisting of the *deniers* as well as the *endorsers* of a newly introduced divine

¹³⁷ ‘Abduh, *Al-Islam Wa Al-Nasraniyye/ Islam and Christianity* 123.

¹³⁸ Cf. Mahmoud Haddad, " Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashīd Riḍā's Ideas on the Caliphate " *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117, no. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1997). Also, al-Kawakibi, *Um Al-Qura*.

¹³⁹ Hasan al-Banna, "Our Message," http://www.ym-site.com/books/our_message/index.htm.

¹⁴⁰ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 197.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² The Qur’an 2/143; 21/92; 23/52 and ...

¹⁴³ 3/104

¹⁴⁴ 7/159

¹⁴⁵ 3/113

¹⁴⁶ 43/22 & 23

message.¹⁴⁷ An initial stage of the life of humanity, supposedly a collective homogeneity, is also described as a unified *umma* (*umma wahida*).¹⁴⁸

The intent in enumerating the above examples is to indicate that *umma* could be conceived in various ways. More importantly, the definition of *umma* by the revivalists does not seem to be very different from the one put forth by Arab nationalists. It must be noted here that the redefinition of *umma* was heavily informed by the Muslim anti-colonial struggle in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – a struggle that shaped modern Muslim self-perception and enabled the revivalists to perceive the entire Muslim world as a unified politico-religious community vis-à-vis the colonial West, with its ties to Christendom. In addition, Muslim Arabs' exclusive, and inherently ethno-religious, claim to the caliphate increased the chance of imagining *umma* in ethnic and political terms.¹⁴⁹

In fact, Muslim revivalist writings, such as that of al-Kawakibi, *exemplify* the inseparability of Arab nationalist and Islamist claims to the caliphate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Al-Kawakibi claimed that all Muslims will fall behind an Arab caliph as in the beginning of Islam. For him, this was true because he believed that “of all ethnic groups, Arabs are the most qualified (*ansab*) to be viewed as [the authentic] source of the religion (*marjaʿan fi al-dini*), and as providing the role model (*qudwa*) for all Muslims.”¹⁵⁰ The ethnic perception of *umma* becomes abundantly clear in al-Kawakibi's writings when he classifies Muslims as ethnic *umam* (plural).¹⁵¹ So, he declares that “no Muslim *umma* (*umam al-Islamiya*), is as eager in

¹⁴⁷ 17/36;

¹⁴⁸ 2/213

¹⁴⁹ For more on this see, chapter three.

¹⁵⁰ al-Kawakibi, *Um Al-Qura*, 196-97.

¹⁵¹ *Umam* (plural ; singular: *umma*)

preserving its own independence and freedom as the Arabs of the Peninsula....”¹⁵² al-Kawakibi claims that Arabic is not only the first language (*khusus*) of one third of the world’s Muslim population, it is also their common (‘*umum*) and richest language.¹⁵³ In defense of Arabs’ exclusive right to the caliphate, al-Kawakibi enumerates various “superior” Arab national traits, and contends that they were “the first *umma* to follow the principle of consultation.”¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, Arabs, he stresses, are “the best guided *umma* in observing *al-ishtrakiya*¹⁵⁵ (egalitarianism)...”¹⁵⁶ and “the most eager *umma* in honoring their pacts....”¹⁵⁷

The discourse of the caliphate in the rest of the *Sunni* world was mostly informed by the colonial presence, and therefore generated degrees of solidarity with the Ottomans. However, the caliphate remained an exclusionary concept for Arabs.¹⁵⁸ Thus, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the invocation of concepts such as *umma* and *khilafa* among Arabs had a much greater bearing on ethnicity than it did in the rest of *Sunni* world. Such an approach to the revival of the institution, under the leadership of an Arab caliphate, could shed some light on the mixed reactions against European colonialism on the part of people such as ‘Abduh, Qasim Amin, and even Rashid Rida and the Wahhabis. Fearing that it could undermine their own claim – even

¹⁵² al-Kawakibi, *Um Al-Qura*, 195.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 196.

¹⁵⁵ The term *al-ishtrakiya* is generally used as to mean socialism. Here, however, egalitarianism seems to be what al-Kawakibi is referring to.

¹⁵⁶ al-Kawakibi, *Um Al-Qura*, 196.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Abbas Mahmud Al-Aqqad, *‘Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-‘Arabi, 1969).

when they sided with the Ottomans against European colonialism – both nationalist and revivalist Arabs remained reluctant to ascribe any legitimacy to the Ottoman caliphate.¹⁵⁹

It is true that in medieval times Muslims did not imagine their community at large as a political community,¹⁶⁰ perhaps because it took only a few decades following the death of the Prophet for Muslims to fall under two rival political rules – one centered in Medina and the other in Damascus. This was the beginning of a never-ending Muslim disunity – a disunity which in the ensuing centuries gained newer dimensions, and in greater scales. More importantly, Muslim discord came to be interpreted differently by those who were part of the experience. Even *ahadith* (plural; singular: *hadith*, the Prophet's sayings) were fabricated, and disagreements (*ikhtilaf*) within the *umma*, at least theoretically, were regarded as a blessing (*rahmahtun*) from God.¹⁶¹ Such interpretations¹⁶² were disparate in nature, ranging from denial of the overall necessity of the state to the legitimization of concurrent rival political domains within the community at large. The majority of *Sunnis* had readily accepted the *hadith* that categorically negates the legitimacy of any state coming after the first four caliphs (the so called *Khulfah al-Rashidun*, or the "Rightly Guided Caliphs").¹⁶³ Thereafter, according to the same *hadith*, the Muslim community will be ruled over by usurping or unjust (*'adud*)¹⁶⁴ kings.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁶⁰ See, Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 197.

¹⁶¹ There are still ongoing discussions among Muslim clerics over this *hadith*. See, <http://www.ebnmaryam.com/vb/t32140.html>

¹⁶² See the next chapter

¹⁶³ See the next chapter.

¹⁶⁴ '*Adud*, from the root-word '*adda*'; literally means biting or holding something with the force of teeth.

¹⁶⁵ Major *Sunni hadith* authorities such as Termodhy, Nisaei have transmitted this *hadith*. See, <http://www.dd-sunnah.net/forum/showthread.php?t=5679>

It cannot be emphasized enough that the ideas of reviving the *umma* and the true *khilafa* coincides with the rise of nationalism and anti-colonialism in the Muslim world, which in turn reveals the shared historical context of Arab nationalism and Islamic revivalism. In the last two centuries, Islamic revivalism has been one way in which modern Muslims have formulated their concerns. Of course, the diversity in Islamic revivalism itself has been informed by different types of ethno-nationalism, geography, and other contextual factors. From early on, Islamic revivalism has concerned itself with a strong and authentic Islamic governance, especially in the face of colonial threat. However, this has not generally prevented a blithe insertion of nationalism into Islamic revivalist discourse.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Arabs more than other Muslims “ethnicized” the discourse of the caliphate. It is worth noting, however, that throughout the Muslim world the idea of the caliphate was becoming increasingly imbued with nationalism. The abolishment of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 uncovered this common tendency among Muslims. While different Muslim groups have tried to keep a nostalgic-sounding caliphate discourse alive, they have also simultaneously prioritized their own national boundaries for any possibility of an Islamic caliphate.¹⁶⁶ Such a nationalistic prioritization resulted in the very first conference for the revival of the caliphate in 1926. In the conference, “each participating delegation wanted to make its own ruler caliph... Abdülhamid, the last true Ottoman caliph to freely exercise its prerogatives, politicized it beyond the permissible.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, the establishment of the caliphate is not essentially universalistic. It should be kept in mind that even if it is perceived as the

¹⁶⁶ For the question that how nationalism might fit in Caliphate movement among the Muslims in South Asia see Adeeb Khalid, "Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and Its Uses," in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga (London ; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005).

¹⁶⁷ Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam : Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*, Studies in Middle Eastern History (Boston, MA: Brill, 2001), 257.

embodiment of a true Islamic state, Islamist groups imagine the creation of a possible caliphate within their current and local national space. It is important to bear in mind that whether such groups are labeled as fundamentalist or Islamist, they have also internalized the boundaries of the nation-state.

Islamists' operation within the confines of the nation-state and their strategic goal to control the state structure forces them to deal with nationalism at various levels. Of course, Islamism is *not* nationalism, if nationalism is perceived as essentially *secular*. However, if nationalism can be derivative, as argued by Partha Chatterjee, and if it is susceptible to taking various forms in order to incorporate local cultural mores, its connection with nationalism is more complex.

Islamist attempts to work through the nation-state are in and of themselves grounds for the fusion of religion and politics, which is informed by "national interest." Also, the modern state has neither entirely removed religion from the public space nor has it expurgated it from politics. Nor is the nation-state indifferent or neutral toward religions. The modern nation-state constantly manages, rethinks, redefines, and selectively incorporates or discards aspects of religion. The state's treatment of religion(s), however, takes place within the confines of a legal regime (that of secularism), and therefore the state's reinterpretation of religion is legally binding. The scale of religious presence and the degree of its utterances notwithstanding, both Islamist and non-Islamist states adopt similar strategies in their management of religions. The state generally, be it Islamist or nationalist, monopolizes religious interpretation. This is carried out by either ignoring or outright penalizing non-state actors' interpretations of religion. The

state practice in Iran,¹⁶⁸ Egypt,¹⁶⁹ Saudi Arabia, and Turkey¹⁷⁰ in the last three decades provides us with ample evidence of this.

Islamism reinterprets Islam and operates through the confines of the *paradigm* of nationalism. The impact of such paradigmatic requirements on religious thinking must not be taken lightly. If Islamism remains, as has been the case so far, incapable of rethinking the nation-state – as the “ideal type” of modern governing system – it is none other than another hostage of what Billig astutely calls “banal nationalism.” Banal nationalism can be conceived as being an inadvertent endorsement and glorification of the nation-state. In other words, the nation-state is “taken for granted.” Whatever the Islamists’ motives may be in their engagement of modern politics is a secondary question. What is at issue here is the inseparability of the Islamists’ vision(s) of the political from that of other types of *homo nationalis*. As with other modes of modern thought, in Islamism the boundaries of the state similarly coincide with that of the nation. An Islamist is content with her/his legal and national “de-affiliation” or “delinking” from the rest of the “*umma*” of Islam.

The normalcy of such contentions is modern and nationalistic. If such a description is correct, then Islamists are neither living in a different universe nor imagining or advocating a way of life that could be situated outside the confines of the modern nation-state. For Islamists, as citizens, the acceptance of the national boundaries does not seem to constitute a dilemma.

¹⁶⁸ The Iranian state’s constant pressure on various religious actors, chief among them *Shi’i Maraji’* (or grand Ayatullahs), evidences this undeniable reality of the state’s will to monopolize religious interpretation of religion.

¹⁶⁹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayed and Nawal El Saadawi’s stories exemplify the secular state’s treatment of the undesirable interpretation of Islam.

¹⁷⁰ Probably the politics of veiling in Turkey more than anything else unveils the ‘secular’ state’s non-neutrality toward religion. Over the enduring debates regarding the headscarf in Turkey, the state unrestrainedly and constantly questioned the Islamic-ness of veiling. The state overtly encouraged and supported pro-state Islamic scholars such as Yaşar Nuri Öztürk to question the religious nature of veiling. The Turkish state was one side of debate not because of its defense of secularism but for its religious interpretation and declaring the un-Islamicness of the veil.

That is why Persian *Shi'i* Muslims in Iran proudly made it a constitutional requirement for their president to be, among other things, an Iranian born citizen and a *Shi'i* with Iranian ancestry (*Irani al-asl*).¹⁷¹ Such a reality signifies that an Islamist ought to be considered a “*homo nationalis*” just like his/ her Christian or Jewish counterparts. After all, in Balibar’s words, “the ‘external frontier of the state’ has to become ‘the internal frontier’” of the citizen,¹⁷² as necessitated by the sheer fact of life within the nationalist paradigm.

As indicated earlier, Islamists are content with the nation-states’ boundaries. Generally, except for some rhetoric about the role of colonialism in imposing current geographic boundaries, there is no significant Islamist literature indicating that the internalization of the national boundaries may constitute a problem to Muslim religious devotion. The blithe endorsement of the existing ethno-national boundaries and repeated nationalist utterances showcases this reality.¹⁷³ What needs to be emphasized here is that a Muslim, be s/he traditionalist or Islamist, will not necessarily see her/himself as irreligious when s/he internalizes the boundaries of the nation-state. Such individuals do not imagine themselves as being part of a community of the faithful torn apart by the unwanted ethno-national frontiers.¹⁷⁴

The past few decades have offered Islamists the control of state power. This opportunity

¹⁷¹ See, Article 115 of The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, http://www.roshd.ir/Portals/0/KarAfarini/PDFs/rules/ghanoone_asasy.pdf.

¹⁷² Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class : Ambiguous Identities*, 95.

¹⁷³ With the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood and Ba‘th party in Iraq, no Arab state refers to the Arab region in Iran as occupied Arab land. In The Muslim Brotherhood’s political literature, this region is described as “occupied Arabistan” or ‘*Arabstan al-muhtallah*. (The term *al-muhtallah* is usually used by the nationalist Arabs in their reference to Palestine.) See, <http://www.ikhwanwiki.com/index.php>. Of course, The Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikwan al-Muslimin*) has had a very complicated relationship with Iranian regime over the past few decades. This example is cited to highlight that how ethnic and religious boundaries can casually coincide in the literature produced by Islamists groups. The embodied nationalism in these reference becomes clearer when the (Sunni) Muslim Brotherhood’s support for *Shi'i* Arabs in Iran is contrasted with their complete disregard to the fate of Kurdish *Sunni* majority.

¹⁷⁴ For an interesting discussion on the coincidence of religious and national frontiers see Barker, *Religious Nationalism in Modern Europe: If God Be for Us*.

has provided, in a few cases, the potential to demonstrate an alternative to the nation-state. However, Islamism not only has not presented any alternative forms of governing; it has been manifestly incapable of showing any fundamental difference in modern modes of governance. For instance, while Islamists in power have attempted to make the laws of the nation more religious, they have exhibited an utter failure even to overcome the limitations put in place by the dominant ethnic groups within their national context. For example, the Iranian regime or the pro-Islamist Turkish government not only function respectively as a Persian or Turkish state, but they also remain inherently intolerant to political, cultural and linguistic representation of the ethnic Other.

When in power, Islamists, in many ways reproduces conservative nationalist politics and policies. Nonetheless, despite their universalist religious and anti-Western slogans, the political stances of Islamists are nationalistic. Like any other nation-state, the foreign policy of Islamist states is determined by what is usually defined as the “national interest.” For instance, both the Iranian regime and Arab Islamist groups have maintained contradictory stances over many catastrophic issues, which have been informed by their regional politics rather than greater Islamic bonds. For example, the massacre of members of The Muslim Brotherhood and defenseless civilians in Hama¹⁷⁵ did not reduce friendly relations between Iran and Syria; rather, it strengthened them. The genocidal wars in the Balkans and outright Russian support for Slobodan Milošević regime in 1990s did not induce any Iranian criticism of Russian foreign policy. Neither did China’s violent repression of its Muslim population become significant

¹⁷⁵ The Hama massacre occurred in February 1982, when the Syrian Army under the orders of the country's president, Hafez al-Assad, conducted a scorched earth operation against the town.

enough to receive any coverage by state media in Iran.¹⁷⁶ When it comes to the Muslims outside their own national boundaries, these states either remain indifferent or address such issues in relation to the banal requirements of their own national interests.

The basic point is that the overall Muslim understanding of their religion is as affected by their attempts to control the modern state as it is by nationalism. The attempt here is not to accuse Islamists of lacking sincerity. What is at issue is to point out that they too have internalized the nation-state as the “ideal type.” It is only in this context that one could possibly make sense of Hassan al-Banna’s statement when he utters that “if they mean by ‘patriotism’ to reinforce the bonds which unite individuals within a given country, and to show them a way of utilizing this reinforcement for their best interests, then we are also in agreement with them on this. For Islam regards this as a necessary religious duty....”¹⁷⁷

To regard patriotism as an Islamic duty in and of itself signifies a great degree of the fusion between Arab nationalism and Islamism in the reconstruction of the modern Islamic thought. Perhaps even more significant is the unintended adaptation of modern ways of describing the nation by the likes of al-Banna, for it indicates that “Islamists” too embrace national identity. The degree of influence that nationalism had on Islamists such as al-Banna can

¹⁷⁶ In 2009 Ibrahim Nabavi, the renowned Iranian satirist tried to unmask the inconstancies in the Iranian state policies towards Muslim affairs around the world. In a piece on the Iranian regime’s salience against China’s oppression of its Muslim minority, Nabavi wrote:

It is a religious obligation to defend Muslims in Germany, Italy [and in the Western Europe]. Because they are the ones who have fled Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria for their own lives.... If those Muslims wish to die, they have to return to their own countries.... The issue of Chinese Muslims is part of China’s internal affairs. Because, for over a millennium, Chinese Muslims have stayed in their own homeland and now they are only slaughtered by their own state. Similarly, we cannot prevent Russian from Massacring Muslims in Chechen. We cannot meddle in the Russian internal affairs. Those Muslims don’t even live in Russia; they live in another country.... All those Muslims who expect to reciev our support should first migrate to a Western European country such as Germany and then get killed there.

(<http://www.roozonline.com/persian/tanssatire/tans-satire-article/archive/2009/july/12/article/-bc1127ea53.html>).

¹⁷⁷ Hassan al-Banna, "Our Message".

be understood when his views are compared with that of Iqbal's.¹⁷⁸ Iqbal contends that "the feeling of patriotism which the national idea evokes, is a kind of deification of a material object, diametrically opposed to the essence of Islam which appears as a protest against all the subtle and coarse forms of idolatry."¹⁷⁹

In summation, national identity is a particular way of referencing or imagining one's nation. "To have a national identity," in the words of Billig, "is to possess ways of talking about nationhood."¹⁸⁰ To have ways of talking about nationhood is a modern phenomenon. As indicated in the outset, the modern religious agent is also inclined to perceive the nation as a self-evident phenomenon; since the religious agent operates within the paradigm of modern nationalism, s/he tends to unite her/his religious consciousness with that of nationalism. As such, the paradigm of nationalism shapes her/his modes of religious interpretations, and it works as a context for rethinking religion and in some ways delimits her/his thoughts.

It is important to note that the modern conception of the state in the Muslim world coincides with the emergence of the religious reform movements and other enormous socio-political changes. The prevalence of religious reform and the emergence of modern forms of Islamic revivalism throughout the 19th and 20th centuries is more than a mere coincidence. In the third decade of the 19th century, the Ottoman state embarked on an epoch-making project, which indicates an epistemic shift in the statesmen's approach to Islam, state, and society. The Sultan took apart the old army, which had strong ties with the old religious establishment. He created a new army that, unlike the previous one, was a part of the state, not a parallel force to it. He

¹⁷⁸ For an interesting book on Muslim nationalism in the early 20th century India see Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea*, First Harvard University Press edition. ed., text.

¹⁷⁹ Iqbal, *Stray Reflections* 35.

¹⁸⁰ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 8.

attempted to centralize the religious establishment in order to manage it and turn it into a state apparatus. It was then that for the first time the highest religious post in *Sunni* religion, *Sheikh al-Islam*, entered the cabinet as an appointee by the Sultan. Moreover, the state adopted a new policy toward the periphery as it attempted to eliminate local powers and ethnic differences. It is also in this era that the state felt the need to educate its subjects in “*the sublime language of the state*,”¹⁸¹ in places as far as its North African domains. These transformations in the state’s policy and its administrative culture coincide with various religious reforms in different domains of the Empire.

The point is that the state began to rethink Islam and the religious establishment, just as it began to rethink itself and its relation with the periphery. Therefore, given these enormous shifts in the Ottoman state and its approach to Islam in the 19th century, both official Ottoman nationalism and Kurdish nationalism (addressed in the following chapters) must be examined in a different light. Moreover, rather than considering concepts such as caliphate, *umma*, and *Sunni*-ness as givens, they should be treated as empty signifiers. They must be studied in their socio-cultural contexts, rather than as abstract concepts that generate the same religious loyalty and sentiment regardless of time, place and culture.

¹⁸¹ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA): Dosya No: 91 Gömlek No: 52 Fon Kodu: A.}MKT. Tarih: 14/Ş /1263 (Hicrî) [28.07.1847]

Chapter 2

The Politics of the *Khilafa*, Old and New

In this chapter I shall briefly attend to some aspects of the historical debates surrounding the concept of the *khilafa*, or the caliphate. I shall touch upon some approaches to the caliphate in pre-Ottoman and Ottoman times, in order to illustrate the heterogeneous nature of its conceptualization among *Sunni* Muslim thinkers. The political discourse surrounding the *khilafa* deserves some attention, as I make repeated references to the caliphate both as a concept and institution throughout this work. Also, there is a prevalent generalization about Muslims' approaches to the *khilafa* in Ottoman studies in general and Kurdish studies in particular. Under this narrow conception, the *khilafa* is typically understood as a religious concept or as institution that has been little affected by socio-political change. It is not rare to come across works in which the author claims that for their reliance "on the Qur'an, the Sunnis believe that every Muslim should pay allegiance to the head of the Muslim community, the Caliph or Imam."¹⁸² Such a degree of generalization is problematic. In this chapter, by way of attending to various historical examples, I will demonstrate that despite some element of continuity, the interpretation of the concept of caliphate has been constantly affected by different socio-historical contexts.

Moreover, due to the aforementioned assumption that the caliphate generated universal Muslim obedience, many scholars have overlooked the connection between the debates over caliphate and rising Muslim communities' nationalist sentiments in the late 19th and early 20th

¹⁸² John Alden Williams, *The Word of Islam*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 202.

century. Still, it should be noted that this study is not a chronological account of the history of caliphate. It provides but a few snapshots of long and ever-changing historical debates on several key questions: How did the caliphate emerge? How did the rise of non-Arab claimants to the institution affect the reinterpretation of the qualifications of the caliph? How did similar processes of reinterpretation help the nationalist imaginations of Muslim communities to figure into the debate over the caliphate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?

The Emergence of the Caliphate (632) and Ensuing Debates

The events after the Prophet Mohammad's death demonstrate that he had not instructed his followers about how the community should be led. Therefore, the emergence of the caliphate, as a form of leadership, can be considered as an accident in Muslim history. As a defense against their theological rivals, *Sunni* Muslim historiography and some parts of their theological literature, declared that this institution was a kind of natural outgrowth of the dogma.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Despite their contradictory contents, there are various *Sunni hadiths* (the sayings attributed to the Prophet) some of which ambiguously and others with clarity hold forth on some aspects of the immediate era after the Prophet's death. Some of these *hadiths* state that it is incumbent on all Muslims to follow his tradition and that of the Rightly Guided Caliphs', (*alaikom bisunnati wa sunnati khulafa ar-rashidin al- mahdiyyin*). These *hadiths* are delineated during this period of the true caliphate according to which the caliphate will last only for thirty years after the Prophet's death. Thereafter, based on *the hadiths*, the caliphate will transform into an oppressive kingdom (*mulkan 'adu*). See, Muhammad ibn Ali al- Shawkani, *Al-Sayl Al-Jarrar Al-Mutadaffiq 'Alá Hada'iq Al-Azhar/ the Torrential Flood over the Garden of Flowers*, vol. 4(Cairo: Lujnah Ihya' al-turath al-Islami, 2000), 472-73. However, as indicated above, the way these events unfolded evidence that the first generation of Muslims was completely unaware of such prophesy about the future. Thus, to claim, as Oliver-Dee does, that "the qualifications and remit of the caliph appear to have been defined with reasonable clarity in the *Hadith* [and] it is from the Traditions that we can glean that the candidate must be of the Quraishi tribe" shows a lack enough familiarity with the contradictory nature of *Hadiths*. See, Sean Oliver-Dee, *The Caliphate Question: The British government and Islamic governance* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 33. The above statement also indicates unfamiliarity with some major historical events after the Prophet's death such as the dispute between Ansar and Muhajiroon over choosing the successors of the Prophet of Islam.

One interesting question is what the debate over caliphate would have looked like if, for instance, the first caliph was a non-Quraishi or he was from Medina? How much the blood lineage or belonging to a certain tribe or place could become a criterion for the caliphal qualification? It should be noted that some of the most permanent companions of the Prophet, from Medina such as Sa'd Ibn 'Ubbadah, did recognize Abu Bakr's leadership position. Ibn 'Ubbadah never accepted Abu Bakr's *Imamate* and refused to pray behind him. He also refused Abu Bakr's

However, the same literature is too contradictory to validate dominant *Sunni* Muslims' own claim in this regard. Montgomery Watt is right in asserting that *khilafa* as a system of governing is not rooted in the Quran.¹⁸⁴ The term *khilafa* in the Qur'an rather than a reference to a governing system seems to indicate generational successions in human history that call for a deeper human contemplation and thinking. Such calls to take heed of those changes have even inspired some Muslim scholars to make use of the term partly as a proof of their belief in the compatibility of the Qur'anic narrative of creation with the theory of evolution.¹⁸⁵

proposal to chose leaders ('umara') from among Meccans and their deputies (wuzara') from among Medinans when Abu Bakr proposed 'umara'un minna we wuzara'un minkom. (At-Tabbari Vol. 3. Pp.197-211 quoted in: Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Islam Wa Al-'Usul Al-Hukm/ Islam and Principals of Authority* (Cairo: Maktaba Ufuq al-Thaqafi, 1925), www.ofouq.com

¹⁸⁴ W.M. Watt, "God's Caliph: Qur'anic Interpretation and the Umayyad Caliphs," in Vladimir Minorsky and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *Iran and Islam: In Memory of the Late Vladimir Minorsky* (Edinburgh,: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), 568. It must be noted that during their rules, the first four caliphs were addressed as *amir al-mu'minin*, the commander of the faithful. The Zaidies have usually used the term *amir* as opposed to caliph. The Twelver *Shi'i* have continued to use this title for Ali, the fourth caliph. He was the only *Shi'i Imam* to be regarded as such. Also, he was the only *Shi'i Imam* who actually had a chance to rule. However, in a way, the constant reassertion of Ali's leadership seems to indicate a continuous protest of the other three caliphs by the Twelvers. The term *Khalifat al-Rasul Allah* too, was generally used in retrospect with a similar purpose to protest the Umayyad's claim to caliphate, which is a shortened version of *Khalifat Allah*. After killing one his grandsons, Hussein and abrogating their contract with another, Hassan, the Umayyad could not easily establish their lineage with al-Rasul (the messenger). However, Abbasids, who destroyed the Umayyad rule, were particularly keen to emphasize their Qureshi-ness and their lineage with Muhammad. Most likely, as the *Hadith* that states "the caliphate will only last for thirty years ..." was also fabricated by Umayyad's opponents; (seemingly this *Hadith's* condemnatory tone with respect to post-Rashidun had inspired Maududy to use as the title of his book, *The Caliphate and the Kingship*.)

¹⁸⁵ Yadullah Sahabi, *Khelqat-E Insan/ the Creation of Man* (Tihran: Shirkat-i Sahami-yi Intishar, 1351/1972). The aim here is not to reproduce the related theological debate by the Muslim commentators, which is vast and disparate. The attempt here is to show that *Khilafa* is not mentioned in the Quran in its political sense or as an institution. The Qur'an 14 times uses variations of the root-word of this term; sometimes in singular and other times in its plural form. Also, the Qur'an employs noun, verb or adjective forms of the term caliphate. However, it usually connotes the replacement or succession of a person, a group, or a society by another. For instance: (The Qur'an 2/30: "I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit (**Khalifah**) it. 7/69): "... Do but remember how He made you [plural] **heirs** [**Khala'if**] to Noah's people..." 7/129 "(Moses) replied: 'it may well be that your [plural] sustainer will destroy your [plural] foe and make you [plural] **inherit** [**yastakhlafakom**] the earth: thereupon he will behold how you act." 27/62: "...has made you [plural] **inherit** [**khulafa**] the earth..." Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar London: Dar al-Andalus; distributors, Brill, 1980). Compare the above verses with what attributed to 'Umar with respect to him becoming a caliph and replacing Abu Bakr: *In Istakhlafu faqad istakhlafa man huwa khairu minni, wa in atrukhum faqad tarakahum man huwa khairu minni*. Should I choose my successor, I would be following the tradition of a person who was better than myself i.e.; Abu Bakr and again, if I leave you without choosing someone to succeed me, I would be following another person better I was: Muhammad. See, Abd al-Malik Ibn Hisham and Muhammad Ibn Is.haq, *Sirat an-Nabi*, trans. Rafi' al-Din Ishaq bn-e Muhammad Hamadani, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Tehran: Kharazmi, 1981), 1109. Of course, this again contradicts the commonly accepted *Sunni* view about the issue of succession.

Both *Shi'is* and *Sunnis* have presented a variety of contradictory traditions attributed to Muhammad, describing the ruler(s) of the community after him. Major historical sources, including that of Ibn Hisham's, the first major Muslim historiographer, show that the community was in complete confusion in the aftermath of his death, in 632. The initial reactions of prominent figures like 'Umar, the second caliph, was a categorical denial of the possibility of the Prophet's death.¹⁸⁶ In addition, there were a number of claimants to the leadership of the community: *al-Muhajiroon* (those who migrated from Mecca to Medina with or followed the Prophet of Islam in 622 CE) and the *al-Ansar* (Helpers from Medina) and others who remained discontented, even after the first caliph's selection. Ali, the fourth Successor, and some of his associates, for instance, were among the discontented. Also, there were the people of apostasy (*ahl ar-riddah*), whose refusal to give *zakat* (religious tax) and to accept Abu Bakr's authority ended only after they were crushed by force.¹⁸⁷

In some ways, the above-mentioned event had a lasting impacts on *Sunni* political thought.¹⁸⁸ It was from that time onward that death was legislated as the proper punishment for apostasy. These events also became the embryonic stage for the later *Sunni* and *Shi'i* differences, the most important of which was whether or not the caliph had to be a Quraishi.¹⁸⁹ 'Umar noted Abu Bakr's Quraishi-ness along with his other qualities for leadership, which solidified Quraishis' supremacy in the eyes of Muslims for centuries to come. The Quraishi lineage became a significant issue for the challenger of non-Arab claimants of the caliphate, and in the age of

¹⁸⁶ *Sirat an-Nabi*, 2, 1113-15.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1125-26.

¹⁸⁸ Here the attempt is to briefly attend to some aspects of the debate surrounding caliphate among *Sunnis*. For a comprehensive sociological study of the issue of authority in Islam see, *Hamid Dabashi, Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads* (New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1989). (New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 1989).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Haddad, " Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashīd Riḍā's Ideas on the Caliphate ".

nationalism Arab nationalists utilized it to serve their cause.

Whether or not Abu Bakr and ‘Umar personally believed in the supremacy of the Quraish, they were farsighted enough to predict that the Quraish would have not accepted the rule of a ruler who was not from Quraish.¹⁹⁰ “Abu Bakr, in a speech made at the Thaqifa, the place for the first grand meeting after the Prophet’s death, clearly gave expression to this view and said: ‘The people of Arabia will not acquiesce in this as long as the Quraish lived.’”¹⁹¹ Upon his death, ‘Umar refused to appoint his successor and famously said, “if Salim, the freed slave (*Mawla*) of Hudhayfa, was alive, I would have appointed him as my successor.”¹⁹² This evinces both Prophet Muhammad's lack of involvement in the creation of the newly established institution after his death as well as the significance of Quraishi tribal lineage in its establishment. Even contemporary ‘Islamist’ scholars such as Abul ‘Ala Maududy or Sayyid Qutb acknowledge that the first four caliphs, who later gained the title of *Rashidun*, rightly guided, had major juridical, political and administrative differences.¹⁹³ Nothing shows their obvious differences better than the fact that Ali, the fourth caliph, had no problem in appointing *Walis* and commanders who had participated in the assassination of the third caliph, i.e. Othman. This issue was one of the causes for his war with ‘Aysha, Muhammad’s wife.¹⁹⁴ Still, the dominant *Sunni* have generally remembered the era of *Rashidun* as the golden age. The title *Rashidun* itself

¹⁹⁰ Shawkani, *Al-Sayl Al-Jarrar Al-Mutadaffiq ‘Alá Hada’iq Al-Azhar/ the Torrential Flood over the Garden of Flowers*, 4, 476. Muhammad Shibli Numani, *Omar the Great, the Second Caliph of Islam*, vol. 1 (Lahore, Sh. M. Ashraf, 1961), 18. Ibn Hisham and Ibn Is.haq, *Sirat an-Nabi*, 2, 1118-22.

¹⁹¹ Shibli Numani, *Omar the Great, the Second Caliph of Islam*, 1, 91.

¹⁹² Amin, *Duha Al-Islam/ the Sunrise of Islam*, 1, 39.

¹⁹³ Cf. Abu al-‘Ala Maududi, *Khilafat Va Mulukiyyat / the Caliphate and Kingship* (Paveh Entesharât-e Bayan, 1985), 115-84; *ibid.* Also, the second part of Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, Rev. ed. (Oneonta, N.Y.: Islamic Publications International, 2000).

¹⁹⁴ Maududy, *Khalafat va Molukiyyat/ Caliphate and Kingship*: 174-75. ‘Ali’s categorical refusal to follow the tradition of his predecessors was the major reason for the selection committee to disqualify him to succeed ‘Umar.

signifies their unique moral and political position in the later *Sunni* religious imagination, which distinguishes them from the rest of Muslim rulers and leaders in the entire Islamic history. Yet, Othman, the third caliph, was assassinated by a group of rioters. Among the rioters, was one of the sons of Abu Bakr, the third caliph. Strict Muslim groups such as the Kharijites not only questioned the fourth caliph's qualification for leadership, but were also among the first groups to question Quraishi lineage as a legitimate prerequisite to lead the community of faithful.¹⁹⁵ Thereafter, the issue of the caliphate becomes much messier.

Looking for a unified view about the issues of caliphate and universal Muslim obedience to given caliph seems to be a futile attempt. Neither Muslims nor Muslim scholars seem to have had consensus on these issues. Their views sometimes might reflect a personal relation with the ruler or the general and independent juridico-political thoughts which with that they identify. For example, Abu Hanifa (699-767), who is known as one of the greatest *Sunni* jurists and the head of the Hanifite School, throughout his life kept his distance from the Palace. Once he was summoned to declare his view about the Abbasid caliphate, he tells the Caliph that he was brought to the Palace to legitimize the de facto power of the establishment. Abu Hanifa contended that it was the Caliph's duty to seek the '*ulama*'s views prior and not after his accession to power. He asserted that the Caliph knew well that no caliphate would be legitimate without the consensus of the Muslim community and their scholars beforehand.¹⁹⁶ However, his most celebrated pupil, Abu Yusuf, was appointed as *Qazi al-Quzat* (chief justice) by the same dynasty. Unlike his master, Abu Yusuf declared that the rulers came to power according to God's will and their subjects were the herds whose shepherd was only responsible before God alone.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Amin, *Duha al-Islam*, 1: 38-96.

¹⁹⁶ al-Kardari quoted in: Maududy, *Khalafat va Molukiyyat/ Caliphate and Kingship*: 305.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 351-52.

With the emergence of the Mu'tazilites, the issue of the caliphate gained a different dimension and they preferred anyone to a Quraishi ruler since, they believed, it would be much easier to oust an unjust non-Quraishi ruler than the other way around.¹⁹⁸ Al-Mawardi's (991-1058) well-known book on governance, *al-Ahkam al-sultaniyya*, reflects the opposite side of the debate. It was an era in which Quraishi-Arabs' exclusive right to rule was challenged. The palace also had become one of the battlegrounds of this fight.

Describing the lineage-based politics of the time, Ahmad Amin cites ample examples of these thoughts and beliefs in the superiority of one blood lineage over another which had infiltrated almost every branch of knowledge from *Hadith* to *Fiqh* and from poetry to *Adab*.¹⁹⁹ It was against this context that al-Mawardi put forward his famous statement, in the aforementioned book, which could be considered as a well-known treatise in defense of the exclusive right of Arabs to govern by claiming that the Quraishis were the only group qualified for caliphate. Al-Mawardi formulated a certain approach that would become one of the persistent positions among the *Sunni* for the centuries to come. Al-Mawardi attempts to utilize the first four decades of *Rashidun* rule as a juridico-theological foundation and as the only legitimate precedent for the Muslim community to choose their leaders. To al-Mawardi, a caliph is a successor of the Prophet, and *Shar' i* precepts necessitate his selection. He states:

[The caliph's] functions are political as well as religious: to maintain orthodoxy, execute legal decisions, protect the frontiers of Islam... He must possess certain qualifications, physical, intellectual, and spiritual, as well as the extraneous qualification of belonging to the same tribe of Muhammad, that of Quraish, and he must be designated for his office by someone else either by choice of the leaders of the community, those who bind and loose', or by choice of the previous caliph. Once chosen, the people owe him

¹⁹⁸ Amin, *Duha Al-Islam/ the Sunrise of Islam*, 1, 79. Also, Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Ali Al-Mas'udi, *Muruj Al-Dhahab Wa-Maadin Al-Jawhar*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Cairo, 1303), 191.

¹⁹⁹ Amin, *Duha Al-Islam/ the Sunrise of Islam*, 1, 93-100.

obedience...²⁰⁰

It should be emphasized that this idea never went unchallenged. A number of prominent contemporaneous scholars like Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar (d.1025) and Abii Bakr al-Asamm (d. 975) and others are known for rejecting the idea of “the obligatory character of the state” itself, let alone its nature or form. They contended that “if the affairs of the community were based on fairness and justice, there remained hardly any need for the state.”²⁰¹ They declared it was up to the community if they wanted to choose a leader for themselves. Some went even a step further and asserted that the task of choosing a leader, *imam*, requires the consensus of the entire community and therefore any selection of leadership at times of turbulence is void (which could entail questioning of the selection of the very first *Rashidun* Caliph). This was the case since, they argued, at such times the attainment of universal consensus becomes impossible.²⁰² These discussions were taking place between the Arabs and *mawali* (freed-people).²⁰³ Non- Arab ethnic tendencies were generally known as *Shu'ubiyya* (non-Arab Muslim reactions to the privileged status of Arabs)²⁰⁴ that took hold among different groups with strong anti-Arab sentiments to anti-Islamic ones. The exclusive governing right of the Muslim Arabs was strongly questioned and the non-Arabs were quick to claim that unlike the Arabs, they had “a rich history of statesmanship.”²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Quoted in Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939. Issued under the Auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*(London, New York,: Oxford University Press, 1962), 10.

²⁰¹ Muhammad al-Ghazali, *The Socio-Political Thought of Shah Wali Allah*(Islamic Research Institute, 2001), 84.

²⁰² Tāj al-Dīn Abū al-Fath Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Karīm Al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal Wa Al-Nihal*, vol. 1(Cairo1946), 51.

²⁰³ *Mawali* is a plural for *mawla*, a freed slave. The Umayyad rulers generally considered non-Arabs a *mawali*.

²⁰⁴ For an interesting and extensive discussion on *Shu'ubiyye* see, Ahmad Amin, *Duha Al-Islam/ the Sunrise of Islam*, 1.

²⁰⁵ Amin, *Duha al-Islam*, 1: 67-70.

The crucial point to be made here is as follows: the debate over the caliphate like many other debates reflects Muslims' disparate views about governance in their contemporary socio-political concerns, which were widely divergent in different stages of Muslim history. It would be simplistic to believe that all Muslims were unified over an immutable political concept and that their views with regard to governance and caliphate remained entirely intact, notwithstanding the passage of time and the change of place. It is clear that if al-Mawardi's views reflected some aspects of the long and ever-changing debates over these issues, so were those of Ibn Taymiyya's (1263–1328), al-Ghazali's (1058-1111) and other celebrated Muslim thinkers. Observing that more than one ruler already ruled the Muslims in his time, Ibn Taymiyya did not have much of a problem with a multiplicity of ruling centers among Muslims. He was content with any form of government, be it a kingdom or caliphate, as long as *shari'a* was implemented,²⁰⁶ while for some of his predecessors such as al-Ghazali, establishing order in society held central importance. Whether the ruler was a caliph or a king, just or unjust, these were all secondary issues to the establishment of the order itself. According to al-Ghazali, to prevent disorder one even has to obey an unjust ruler.²⁰⁷

Theological roots of the late Ottoman Caliphate

Having glanced at some of the sketches of early debates over the caliphate it is necessary to take a brief look at the Ottoman in 16th century as the first non-Arab claimants of the caliphate. This is particularly significant considering that Abdülhamid II based his reinvigorated

²⁰⁶ Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939. Issued under the Auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 6.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

caliphate claim on the same theological reasoning that was put forward by the famous Ottoman statesman Lutfî Paşa in the 16th century.²⁰⁸

A cursory look at the 16th century Ottoman history, when they began to claim caliphate, indicates that the previous debates could not be settled easily. As shown below, Lutfî Paşa's (1488 – 1564) booklet on caliphate²⁰⁹ clearly illustrate that justifying the ruler's legitimacy was becoming even more problematic.

In the 16th century, after conquering the Arab heartlands and expanding his empire enormously, Selim I (d. 1520) took the title of the Caliph of Islam, becoming the first Ottoman sultan to do so. At the same time, he gained the title of “*Khâdim al-Haramain al- Sharifain*,”²¹⁰ the servant of the two holy places (Mecca and Medina).²¹¹ However, it turned out that these titles and claims were not sufficient to persuade his subjects entirely to concede to his proclaimed religious status as a caliph. Religious challenges did not die down and the Sultan's opponents reinvigorated the age-old debate over the caliphate with a new force in the face of a non-Arab claimant of *Khilafa*.²¹² It seems that the debate made its way well into the reign of Sultan

²⁰⁸ Karpas, *The Politicization of Islam : Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*, 243.

²⁰⁹ See, Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "Lutfî Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate," [Lutfî Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate.] *Orient*, Vol. 15 (Dec. 31, 1962), pp. 287-295. Since I could not obtain the original booklet by Lutfî Paşa, I had to rely on Gibb's translation of it.

²¹⁰ It is interesting to note that Saudi press and media always refer to Saudi Kings as the servants of the holy shrines. In 1987, after the Iranian regime challenged their authority during the ritual of Haj, such a reference to these kings became a tradition.

²¹¹ Al-Aqqad, 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi 69. Also, M. Naeem Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics : A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924*, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia, (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 1999), 13.

²¹² In his discussion on the local resistance to the Ottoman rule, Makdisi recounts that “the first century of Ottoman rule in Mount Lebanon was turbulent, and it witnessed frequent local rebellions and equally frequent Ottoman expeditions to subdue the local inhabitants”. See, Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 775.

Suleyman and led his grand vizier Lütü Paşa, (d.1562) to write a booklet²¹³ in defense of the legitimacy of the Sultan and of a non-Arab caliphate.

This booklet in part reproduces a context in which existed multiple claimants of the caliphate. Al-Mutawakkil, the last Abbasid Caliph, still remained in power until his death in 1543. The Mughals, who had advanced in India, did not accept the Ottomans' so-called "universal caliphate" claim because scholars like Jalal al-Din al-Dawani (1427-1501) had already legitimized the simultaneous rule of more than one caliph.²¹⁴ So did Ibn Taymiyah; as indicated earlier, a few centuries before Dawani, Ibn Taymiyya had expressed similar views with a stronger emphasis on the implementation of the *Shari'a*. It seems that they were so eager to convince the other rulers and to submit to their rule wherever they could not militarily hold their territories. Needless to say, such demands must have been as made in the name of religion. However, what is important here is the existence of multiple interpretations of the concept of caliphate that are partly represented in Lütü Paşa's booklet.

The booklet reproduces a variety of theoretical challenges that were directed at the Sultan's legitimacy. The jargon in Lütü Paşa's booklet illustrates the seriousness of the posed challenges and questions by contemporary scholars with respect to Suleyman the Lawgiver's rule, who was introduced as the guardian of the *Shar'* and reformer of the customary laws, "*'urfi diwans*."²¹⁵ The booklet is indicative of the rise of the *Shi'i* Safavids, along with millenarist and other theological challenges²¹⁶ as the author strives to establish that kingship is encompassing both Imamate and caliphate. Lütü Paşa makes a painstaking effort to prove that

²¹³ Gibb, "Lütü Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate."

²¹⁴ Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian politics : a study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924*: 13.

²¹⁵ Gibb, "Lütü Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate," 288-89.

²¹⁶ Cf. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Zındılar Ve Mülhidler/ Heretics and Infidels* (Istanbul: Tarih Vekfi Yurt Yayınları, 2003).

the Sultan not only is a caliph but also “the *imam* of the age” or the *imam* of all the *imams*. For that, he resorts to a whole host of textual (*naqli*) and rational (*‘aqli*) arguments that he assumes could justify the Sultan’s religious legitimacy vis-à-vis the dissenters.

Quraishi-ness, once a problem for Mu‘tazilites, now had become an enduring challenge to the non-Arab caliphs that was repeatedly raised against any claimants to the caliphate. It seems this was a powerful tool against later generations of rulers in the hands of people. As it is shown in Lütfi Paşa’s booklet, some of the earlier traditional *Sunni mutakallimun* (theologians) such as Taftazani (1312-1389)²¹⁷ and ‘Umar al-Nafis (1213-1288), raised important questions with regard to equating kings or sultans with caliphs and *Imams*. Therefore, Lütfi Paşa tries to refute their views by referring to that of other *Sunni* scholars and implies that the views of these two scholars on the caliphate are not acceptable to the *Sunni ‘ulama* and community at large.

Sa‘daddin al-Taftazani argued that the end of *Rashidun* also ended the caliphal institution (of “the Prophetic Mission”). He considered the ending of the Abbasid reign to be tantamount to the end of Imamate. Al-Taftazani defended his position that “the *Imam*[ate] of Quraish; and as for the status of the Sultans, this arises from conquest and seizure, not from fitness and rightfulness (*istihqaq*).”²¹⁸ Therefore, it was not permissible to use such a title for non-Quraishi rulers.²¹⁹ However, to al-Taftazani, neither the title of caliphate nor Imamate of a lower-level

²¹⁷ In the 20th century, Al-Taftazani’s views, once again, were criticized by Rashid Rida, a staunch defender of Arab caliphate. See; Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Al-Khilafa Aw Al-Imama Al-Uzma/ the Caliphate or the Great Imamate*(Cairo: Matba’at al-Manar bi-Misr, 1934).

²¹⁸ Gibb, "Lütfi Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate," 292. (Later in 19th and 20th century, British Colonial officials made similar arguments in their defense of a possible Arab caliphate. Cf. Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924*, The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage, (New York: Brill, 1997).

²¹⁹ In the 18th century, Shah Waliullah Dehlawi, the most renowned and influential scholar in the Indian subcontinent, once more, cited Quraishi-ness, as a necessary qualification for a caliph. Yet, in addition to Quraishiness, he argued, that a Muslim caliph must be the most prominent scholar and *mujtahid* of his time (see Muhammad al-Ghazzali, 2001). Yet, the grandson of Shah Waliullah, Shah Muhammad Ishaq (1778-1846), with support of the Ottomans, during the *Tanzimat* era, exhibited a starkly different approach to the issue of *Khilafa*. He “was probably the first Indian ‘*alim* who supported the Ottoman policies from around 1841 when he migrated to

religious title can be used for non-Arab rulers. As such, in the post-Abbasid era, any ruler with no Quraish lineage was a usurper of the leadership position and his rule lacked legitimacy. Thus, according to al-Taftazani, the only legitimate Post-*Rashidun* leadership, with some degree of legitimacy would be *imamate*, not caliphate, which exclusively belongs to Quraish. Non-Arabs were not seen to be qualified for the position of either caliphate or *imamate*. Therefore, in al-Taftazani's view, the caliphate, which lasted only thirty years after the Prophet's death, was a higher level of Islamic leadership that was not revivable. Some 20th-century modernist *Sunni* scholars like Shakib Arslan (1869–1946) also held a similar view but remained supportive of the Ottoman State.²²⁰

To refute such ostensibly restrictive views, which if they had been accepted would have meant an automatic disqualification of Ottoman caliphate or *imamate*, Lütü Paşa resorts to some textual sources and recounts a number of prophetic sayings in which *imamate*, caliphate and sultanate are all equated in terms of their religious standing.²²¹

At times, Lütü Paşa resorts to a more rational approach by referring to the necessity of socio-political order, which in its absence he argues people will not be able to live up to their obligations, religious and otherwise.²²² As such, the establishment of order by a ruler is tantamount to creating an environment for the community to live up to their religious obligations and therefore this very act is sufficient to legitimate his rule. By the mere establishment of the

Mecca." Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924*: 16. Muhammad al-Shawkani (1759–1834) the renowned Yemeni scholar, also held similar view to that of Shah Waliullah's with regard to the qualifications a caliph. Yet, Al-Shawkani believed that there was no difference between caliphate and *Imamate* and they both ended as the *Rashidun* era ended. (cf. al-Shawkani, *al-Sayl al-jarrar al-mutadaffiq 'alá Hada'iq al-Azhar/ The Torrential Flood Over the Garden of Flowers*, 4: 472-83.

²²⁰ al-Aqqad, *'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi*

²²¹ Gibb, "Lütü Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate," 288-90.

²²² *Ibid.*, 290.

order, a ruler can legitimate his rule. Similarly, for al-Ghazali and Lütfi Paşa, sultans and kings' legitimacy originates from the very order they create. To Lütfi Paşa, the Sultan's mere ability to establish order should be accepted as a sufficient condition for the subjects to become loyal and obedient to his authority. Lütfi Paşa claims, "[a] man becomes a Sultan by two things: the first, by the swearing of allegiance to him, and the second, that he effectively executes his decision."²²³

The concept of *bai'a*, swearing of allegiance, in post-*Rashidun* and particularly in the Ottoman era, has much to do with a given sultan's 'effectiveness in executing his decisions' rather than the consensus of the community of the faithful. Therefore, these two conditions in reality are just one. For the Prophet Muhammad, *bai'a* was a pledge by his followers based on the fact that they could not disobey him in *ma'ruf*—what is good or right.²²⁴ To Lütfi Paşa, apparently, the mere absence of violence against the Sultan should be interpreted as people's consensus and their allegiance to the Sultan's rule. Thus, he states:

[He is the] sultan of the Arabs, the Turks, the Kurds and the Persians, and under his hand are many lands, as we have stated; and there is rightly applicable to him the definition of the *Imam* inasmuch as he is the lieutenant of the Apostle in maintaining the Faith in the requisite manner over all the peoples subject to him.²²⁵

It is evident that there must have been debates whether an unjust ruler is a legitimate one; whether a Muslim has to follow such a ruler or whether he is obliged to launch a war against him, whether an unjust ruler can rule the Muslim community or whether he shall be obeyed at

²²³ Gibb, "Lütfi Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate."

²²⁴ The Quran, 42/38: "O Prophet! Whenever believing women come unto thee to pledge their allegiance to thee ...and would *not disobey thee in anything right* [*ma'ruf*]- then accept their pledge of allegiance" what needs to kept how these concepts could change over time. The text indicate that women could have ascertained what is wrong and right they were obliged to obey only what they believe was right.

²²⁵ Gibb, "Lütfi Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate," 293.

all.²²⁶ Lütü Paşa rejects the idea of just conduct as a necessary condition for accepting the Sultan as a caliph, notwithstanding his emphatic defense of Ottoman justice and claiming that “the ‘Osmani[s]²²⁷ are blameless with respect to maintenance of the Faith and Equity and the *chad* [Ar. *Jihad*].”²²⁸ As such, he tries to delegitimize any uprising or *jihad* against a sultan for his unjust conduct.

Lütü Paşa, in his booklet, justifies this claim with another non-textual argument when he states that “...the lands of Islam which are in the hands of the infidels are undoubtedly lands of Islam, not lands of [the Domain of]²²⁹ War.”²³⁰ Lütü Paşa presupposes the lack of justice in any domain that is ruled by non-Muslim rulers, notwithstanding the subjects’ religion. Therefore, he argues that despite the lack of justice, a land populated by Muslims cannot be treated as the domain of war, *dar al-harb*. And by way of analogy, Lütü Paşa tries to relax the condition of just conduct in order for a Muslim ruler to be recognized a caliph. Hence, the Sultan must be followed and the Muslims are not allowed to unleash violence against him simply for his lack of just conduct. What is revealing here is the supposition that if a sultan is not recognized as caliph, violence against him is automatically seen permissible. However, if an unjust sultan is accepted as caliph, violence against him cannot be justified.

Lütü Paşa’s booklet is significant as it highlights the fact that the debate over the caliphate had remained unsettled. In each era, with new social, political and historical events unfolding, the debate gained newer dimensions. It also indicates relentless efforts by groups and

²²⁶ This question in particular carries traces of *Shi‘i* belief since the ruler must be just and infallible according to earlier Shi‘ism.

²²⁷ In the original text.

²²⁸ Gibb, "Luṭfī Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate," 294.

²²⁹ In the original text.

²³⁰ Gibb, "Luṭfī Paşa on the Ottoman Caliphate," 290.

communities to resist the rulers' pressure to guarantee a greater degree of submission on the part of the subjects.²³¹ As the rulers resorted to new arguments to overcome the crisis of their legitimacy, so did people venture into other ways to question their claims. If some groups in the Umayyad and Abbasid era, as shown earlier, found Quraishi lineage as an obstacle for ending unjust rule, the lack of such a lineage turned into a big liability for the later generations of rulers. In subsequent eras, the lack of Arab, to be more precise, Quraishi, lineage became a liability for the rulers. The lack of Arab lineage was regarded as a violation of a sacred tradition and as a sign of degeneration and moving astray from that tradition that was founded by and embodied in the exemplary rule of *Rashidun*. The model of *Rashidun* was remembered and sanctified as a yardstick to measure the degree of degeneration of the contemporary rules in *Sunni* community.

The caliphate from its inception produced neither a universally accepted definition nor a universal obedience among *Sunni* Muslims. To explain ruler-ruled relations with the sole focus on people's religiosity as if it is a singular phenomenon that is almost everywhere manifested and construed identically, one has to grossly oversimplify the situation. The concept of *khilafa* thus should not be treated as if it has remained unaffected by the passage of time and the change in the social political context. It is erroneous to assume that the *khilafa* generated a universal following amongst *Sunni* Muslims; that *Sunni*-ness alone sufficed as a criterion for making all *Sunnis* obedient to a Caliph such as Abdülhamid II (1876-1909).

It must be noted that in the post 16th century, among various titles used by the Ottoman rulers, 'caliph' was rarely used until the 18th centuries. Even if the Sultans did use this title, they "did so without attaching much weight to it...They sometimes used it as a term of praise for other

²³¹ For a detailed historical account on different religious groups' resistance to the Ottoman rule's, in the 16th century, see, Ocak, *Zindiler ve Mülhidler/ Heretics and Infidels.*; Also, Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and intellectual in the Ottoman Empire : the historian Mustafa Ali (1541-1600).*

Muslim rulers...”²³² It was during the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca of 1774, which was the outcome of the Ottoman defeat at the hand of the Russian, that the Ottoman decided to revive the caliphate. Such a revitalization of the caliphate was merely an outcome of the Ottomans’ new intentional standing. The above-mentioned treaty

marked the full emergence of Russia as a world power and the rapid decline of Ottoman military power....The Ottoman trade monopoly in the Black Sea was broken and the czar received the right to make representation to the Porte on behalf of its Orthodox Christian subjects while Russia's Muslims were permitted to acknowledge the caliph as their religious head. The newly acquired rights gave both rulers the means to incite nationalist sentiments in their respective communities. Russia justified its drive into Ottoman lands as a move designed to liberate Orthodox Christians and used religion to incite resistance, thereby transforming faith into a foundation for the Balkan Slavs' nationalism.²³³

It cannot be emphasized enough that even a quick reading of modern Muslim history indicates a different situation than the assumed universal obedience to the caliphate. As far as the *khilafa*’s theoretical grounding, the 1876 Ottoman constitution marked the end of the “traditional” *Sunni* approach to the institution, granting that there was a unified *Sunni* approach. The second era of Ottoman Constitutionalism in 1909 commenced its practical end. For instance, the Ottoman constitution no longer recognized the caliph as *imam* or *mujtahid*, in the traditional sense. That is, the extent of the caliph’s power could no longer be sought out in the Qur’an and the Prophetic traditions.

The first Ottoman Constitutionalist movement proved unsuccessful. However, it was an attempt, among other things, to specify the limits of the Sultan/Caliph’s power. In fact, the constitution was a means for transforming him into a constitutional monarch.²³⁴ With the

²³² Albert Hourani, *The Emergence of the Modern Middle East*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 8.

²³³ Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Turkish Politics and Society: Selected Articles and Essays*, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East (Boston, MA: Brill, 2004), 490-91.

²³⁴ The letter of Midhat Pasha, the main author of the 1876 Ottoman constitution, to Abdulhamid II, is very revealing. Midhat Pasha writes:

inauguration of Constitutionalism, the caliph was bound, at least in theory to follow the constitution as his decrees no longer constituted the law of the land.²³⁵ It is important to point out that such a blow to the (assumed) traditional view of the caliphate caused no outrage in either the Muslim world at large, or within the Empire. This in and of itself evidences that, despite the significance of the event, the *Sunni* Muslim community did not perceive those structural changes caliphate as an encroachment on Islamic tenants. The final draft of the 1876 constitution contained a stipulation stating that “the Sultan cannot be held accountable,”²³⁶ a clause that in fact meant that he had no responsibilities. This paradox signaled the gulf between the ideal and the real constitutional power structure.²³⁷ And yet, at the same time, it also illustrated the indefensibility of the older approaches to the caliphate.

In essence, Constitutionalism marked the end of the caliphate as it was known. Nevertheless, the second phase of Constitutionalism received a great deal of support from high-ranking clerics.²³⁸ For instance, the famous Kurdish scholar, Bediüzzaman Said-i Nursi, spent

Your majesty my king! The goal for drafting [the constitution] and for the declaration of the principals of Constitutionalism was: To end autocracy (*istibdad*), to inform (*ikaz*) you about your responsibilities and to make the responsibility of the ministers known and appropriately assigned; achieve complete equality among our people; and for all of us to embark on true reforms, together. The reason for the declaration of the Constitutionalism was not just to bring a good resolution to the Eastern problem. It was not a charming slogan for show to shut the Europeans’ mouths against us. I must clarify (*izahat*) certain issues to your majesty. First, your majesty, you have to be aware of all your responsibilities as the ruler. In the nation’s eye (*millet nezadrinda*) you will be held accountable (*mas’ul*) for all of your actions ... I, as your majesty’s humble servant, am extremely loyal to you. Nonetheless, *I shall declare and excuse myself from your obedience in anything that may even slightly harm or contradict the interests of the nation.*

See, *İstikbal* (No: 25; 12/22/1880).

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ See, "1876 Constitution," in *Salname-i Devlet*(Istanbul: Matbaa-i Ahmet İhsan ve Şurekası, 1322/1904).

²³⁷ For a detailed study of the Ottoman Constitution, see Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period : A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament*, The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963).

²³⁸ Cf. Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, 1902-1910*(Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

two years of his life propagating the idea of Constitutionalism in Kurdistan. He even offered his own version of a constitutional caliphate.²³⁹ Needless to say, neither phases of Ottoman/Turkish Constitutionalism nor the eventual demise of the caliphate turned the Muslim world into a bloodbath. Yet especially in the field of Kurdish studies the caliphate has been assumed to be a universally followed religious institution. We are told that prior to the 1920s, ethnicity “did not define boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the imperial system. Rather...the Kurds considered themselves part of the dominant Muslim majority group.”²⁴⁰

Contrary to some scholars’ claims—particularly in the field of Kurdish studies—the debate must be understood in direct relation to the existing power dynamics, rather than as being an inseparable element of the Muslim faith. Unlike Metin Heper does, for instance, one should not assume “that the Kurds almost always preferred to live under an Islamic rather than an all-unifying nationalist government. They displayed such a preference because they had always had a strong loyalty to the caliphate.”²⁴¹ It is not rare to come across assumptions that regard the Kurdish revolts in the late 19th and early 20th century as being devoid of any ethno-nationalistic character. Such views are foregrounded in the fact that those Kurdish revolts were mainly led by religious leaders in a tribal society. In his discussion on the 1925 Kurdish uprising, Heper claims that the leader of the revolt believed that the Ottoman “dynasty and caliphate were absolute necessities for the survival of Turkey.”²⁴²

Generally, the scholarship on Muslim history in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

²³⁹ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 115; *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons* (Istanbul: Zehra Yincilik, 2009).

²⁴⁰ Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*, 1st ed., Modern Intellectual and Political History of the Middle East (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2005), xviii.

²⁴¹ Metin Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation* (Basingstoke England ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 148.

²⁴² Ibid., 149.

perceives Muslims as a unified religious community free of ethnic self-consciousness.²⁴³ Thus, Muslim ethno-national consciousness and their break with the *Sunni* caliphate is deemed inconceivable. Therefore, “It should not be a surprise to the reader” Hakan Özoğlu claims that after WWI some Kurdish political factions were “against complete autonomy, for they believed in the unity of the Islamic ummah and until the end of the Ottoman Empire and even afterwards they saw the sultan as the legitimate caliph.”²⁴⁴ As shown in following chapters, neither the caliphate nor “tribalism” could prevent the rise of Muslim ethno-nationalist sentiments. Heper goes as far as to claims that

an important factor that induced the [Kurdish] chieftains to seek no more than autonomy from the central government was the fact that chieftains *had traditional and religious worldviews and, as a result, they identified themselves with the caliphate in Istanbul.*²⁴⁵ Furthermore, since the chieftains’ legitimacy had religious grounds, for them being part of a basically Muslim empire rather than that of an independent Kurdish entity was preferable.²⁴⁶

Religiosity is generally assumed to pre-date any type of nationalist tendency²⁴⁷ and therefore any claim about the existence of Kurdish nationalism even in the early 20th century is supposedly

²⁴³ Cf. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*.

²⁴⁴ Cf. Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*, Suny Series in Middle Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 124. The head of this “faction” was no one other than Seyyid Abdulqadir. In the late 19th century, Seyyid Abdulqadir joined the CUP just a few years after its creation. Interestingly, Özoğlu sees no contradiction between the above statement and his earlier remarks when he states: “It is interesting to encounter his name in the CUP, then an underground organization that worked against the sultan/caliph Abdulhamid II, because Abdulkadir himself was a part of the Ottoman religious establishment” (90). These assertions become even more interesting when they are contrasted with the state records. The state documents reveal Abdulqadir had no qualms about killing Ottoman soldiers; in 1882, “Sheikh Abdulqadir, the son of Sheikh Ubeydullah, in his attack on the royal army martyred 10 and injured 12 Soldiers. He also captured 30 soldiers including their commanding officers.”

See, BOA: Dosya No: 3, Gömlek No: 4, Fon Kodu: Y. PRK.A; Tarih: 23/M /1300 (Hicrî)/ [4.12.1882]

²⁴⁵ Emphasis added.

²⁴⁶ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 45.

²⁴⁷ See the preceding chapter.

anachronistic.²⁴⁸

At times, these studies have been under the direct influence of the official Kemalist historiography.²⁴⁹ The Turkish state tried to frame opposition groups, especially after the establishment of the Republic, as reactionary and attempting to revive the Ottoman past. In the early 1920s, there was a heterogeneous approach to the abolishment of the caliphate in the Turkish parliament. Major arguments in favor of the abolishment of the caliphate were made within the confines of Islamic religious discourse. Mustafa Kemal and his camp argued that the caliphate was not an institution prescribed by dogma but was instead the product of traditional juridical literature.²⁵⁰ As such, they contended that the original establishment of the caliphate was not a religious imperative. Neither did the caliphate's abolition have any bearing on Islam.²⁵¹ The Kemalists argued that Islam solely requires the establishment of the state, which supersedes and encompass "the government, republicanism and the caliphate."²⁵² However, after 1925 the Kemalists, due to the geopolitical interests of their new state, described the caliphate as a backward notion. To legitimize their domestic policy of purging and suppression, they frequently accused their opponents of reactionism and longing for the past or the caliphate.²⁵³

Kurdish historiography, in its general invocation of 'the unbridgeable gap' between

²⁴⁸ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey*, 148.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Mujtaba Borzuei, *Avžâ°-E Kordestan Az 1258-1325/ the Situation in Kurdistan from 1879 to 1946*(Tehran Nashr-e Nou, 1999). Also, Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*.

²⁵⁰ For one the most profound discussions on caliphate by Seyyid Bey, the Turkish Justice Minister in 1924, see, TBMM zabıtları (Turkish Grand National Assembly's minutes): , [VII, 1 Mart 1340 (1924)] Pp. 55-65, <http://www.tufts.ac.jp/common/fs/asw/tur/htu/data/HTU2136%28ZC%29-35/index.djvu>.

²⁵¹ See, *ibid.*

²⁵² Quoted in Taha Akyol, *Atatürk'ün İhtilal Hukuku/ the Revolutionary Justic System of Atatürk*(Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2012), 387.

²⁵³ Even renowned secular figures journalist Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın was regarded a reactionary who opposed Kemalist policies with respect to the abolition. Yalçın deemed the abolishment of the Caliphate harmful to the geopolitical interest of Turkey. Cf. *Ibid.*, 327.

religion and nationalism, exhibits a partial adaptation of the Kemalist state discourse. This scholarship has adopted the Kemalist state narrative in which Kurdish movements are either portrayed as religious or nationalist. The Kemalist state tried to redefine itself as a modern and pro-West entity. In turn, it strove to paint its opposition—both Kurdish and non-Kurdish—as backward religious attempts to defend the past. Kemalist supporters also found it important to stress the impossibility of any fusion between religion and nationalism. They thus put forward an incoherent narrative in their depiction of Kurdish resistance and depicted it as nationalist sometimes and religious other times. Likewise, some studies on Kurds reject any possibility for Islamic and nationalistic tendencies to unite.

When it comes to their relations with the Ottoman Sultan, *Sunni* Muslims in general, and the Kurds in particular are perceived as a monolithic community, and the idea of the caliphate is thought of as being an immutable and undisputed religious concept throughout Islamic history. For instance, some Western scholars described the 1925 Kurdish revolt as the expression of “Mohammedan fanaticism [that] was outraged by Mustapha (*sic*) Kamal’s policy of secularization”²⁵⁴ began with the abolishment of the Ottoman caliphate, “which was the very embodiment of Islam.”²⁵⁵ There are historians who assume that the *Sunni* participants in early Kurdish uprisings had incontestable allegiances to the Ottoman Caliph.²⁵⁶ However, Turkish statesmen themselves were aware of the inaccuracy of such generalizations. In 1924 during the debates the abolition of the caliphate, the Turkish Justice Minister admitted that the scholars in

²⁵⁴ John Parker and Charles Smith, *Modern Turkey*(London,: G. Routledge & sons, 1940), 12.

²⁵⁵ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 148.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Hakan Özoglu, "Does Kurdish Nationalism Have a Navel?," in *Symbiotic Antagonisms: Competing Nationalisms in Turkey* ed. Ayse Kadioglu and Emin Fuat Keyman(Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011).

Kurdistan had never ascribed any legitimacy to the Ottoman Caliphal claims.²⁵⁷

Mischaracterization of the debate and depiction of the caliphate as if it was a pillar of faith that made it incumbent on every Muslim to blindly obey any self-proclaimed caliph gravely mystifies both the debate itself and the early stages of Kurdish nationalism. The following statement by Heper symbolizes such a mischaracterization when he claims that “it was particularly the Kurds, who, being overwhelmingly *Sunni* Muslim in religion, came to have an unqualified sympathy and support for their Sultan-Caliph, and considered him as both their religious and political leader.”²⁵⁸ Hence, when it comes to the Kurdish-Ottoman caliph relationship, it is not hard to see the impact of orientalist historiography and Kemalism, which the latter projects its own despised “oriental image” onto the Kurdish other.²⁵⁹ By labeling Kurdish movements as a mere longing for the Hamidian rule and *irticai* (reactionary), the Kemalist state on the one hand was hiding its double approach to religiosity, and on the other perpetuating the age-old-Ottoman orientalizing²⁶⁰ of the periphery.

The aim here was to show that the caliphate did not always mean the same thing and the rulers’ claims to the caliphate did not automatically result in people’s submission, and the Kurds, as shown in the following chapters, were no exception to this rule. When comes to later Ottoman Caliphs such as Abdülhamid II, many contemporary Muslims were well aware of the fact that he propagated Muslim unity in the hope of assimilating non-Turkish into a campaign for confronting the European challenge to the empire.

²⁵⁷ For the complete text see, TBMM zabıtları (Turkish Grand National Assembly’s minutes): [VII, 1 Mart 1340 (1924)] p. 44-70. <http://www.tufts.ac.jp/common/fs/asw/tur/htu/data/HTU2136%28ZC%29-35/index.djvu>.

²⁵⁸ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 51.

²⁵⁹ Cf. <http://welatzeydanlioglu.wordpress.com/>

²⁶⁰ Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism.”

Chapter 3

Ottoman/ Turkish “Official Nationalism”

I think...as history, nationalism's autobiography is fundamentally flawed.
- Partha Chatterjee²⁶¹

Getting history wrong' is the precondition of nationalist history.
- David McCrone²⁶²

Having discussed aspects of caliphate debate, it is now essential to attend to one of the most significant historico-political sources of the Hamidian regime, i.e.; “official nationalism.”²⁶³ The Hamidian regime inherited a tradition of political, bureaucratic, military and cultural reforms, which had been initiated many decades earlier.²⁶⁴ This era of reforms can also be recognized by a semi-global trend which had affected the self-perception of the Ottoman state as well as surrounding states. This trend is what Anderson calls official nationalism. Official nationalism is described by Anderson as “a discernible tendency among the Euro-Mediterranean

²⁶¹ Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, 6.

²⁶² David McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism: Tomorrow's Ancestors*, International Library of Sociology (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998), 44.

²⁶³ For more on the concept of official nationalism see: Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London ; New York: Verso, 1991), 83-111.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998). Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought : A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, 1st Syracuse University Press ed., *Modern Intellectual and Political History of the Middle East* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000). Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey : A Modern History*, 3rd ed. (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

monarchies to sidle towards a beckoning national identification.”²⁶⁵ The attempt here is not to attend to the Ottoman *Tanzimat* in depth but to show: Firstly, the discrepancy in the literature on the late 19th century Ottoman official nationalism. Secondly, the Ottomans were by no means immune to official nationalism because of their religion and thirdly, Hamidian official nationalism (discussed in the next chapter) was a culmination of a trend that had started in the preceding decades.

After Bernard Lewis’ 1961 *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*,²⁶⁶ it has become commonplace in the scholarship on Ottomans to defend the latency of Turkish nationalism. Lewis claimed that “The Empire had been a nonmodern state system designed to govern a vast multiethnic, multilinguistic, and multireligious population. The ‘Turkish’ and ‘Islamic’ people of Asia Minor had therefore remained unconscious of themselves as a people in the course of making and sustaining it.”²⁶⁷ In essence, Lewis’s claim is based on a hierarchal Eurocentric understanding of “world history” in which any nation that has not undergone a complete process of “Westernization” is deemed “pre-modern” and for the same reason cannot be considered self-conscious. This type of hierarchical conception of “world history” is best manifested in Hegel’s conception of history, in which he divides nations into those with a clear consciousness of history and those with a murky one when he says:

Nations whose consciousness is obscure, or the obscure history of such nations, are . . . not the object of the philosophical history of the world, whose end is to attain knowledge of the Idea in history—the spirits of those nations which [have] become conscious of their inherent principle, and have become aware of what they are and what their actions signify, are its object²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 85.

²⁶⁶ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 3.

²⁶⁷ Michael E. Meeker, *A Nation of Empire : The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), xiii.

²⁶⁸ Guha, *History at The Limit of World-history*: 35.

Lewis's own classification of the Ottomans as "nonmodern" is sufficient enough for him to brand them as peoples with a lack of national self-consciousness or, to use his own term, "unconscious of themselves." The religion of the majority of the Ottoman polity, i.e. Islam, of course will add to the layers of this "unconsciousness." For Lewis, the real nation was born after the creation of a "secular, Western oriented, and civic nationalist Republic;" the people made a leap from pre-history into the history of consciousness and became the subject of their history.²⁶⁹ This is how "The 'Turkish' and 'Islamic' people of Asia Minor had consequently become conscious of themselves as they moved from the imperial to the national phase of their history."²⁷⁰ In this evolutionary reading, after the end of the old regime, there begins another phase in Turkish history, where a new "modern state" suddenly "emerges."²⁷¹ With the emergence of the modern state, Turkey supersedes the condition that Hegel identifies as the "so-called unity of the spirit with nature which we encounter in the Oriental World."²⁷²

Generally, the thesis of the latency of Turkish nationalism, until the First World War, is defended along these lines. In more recent works, the so-called non-modern characteristic of the Empire has been dropped. However, the essence of the argument for this 'latency' remains the same. For instance, Taner Akçam, in his work *From Empire to Republic*, defends this view when he states that "due to the multiethnic character of the Empire, the Ottoman ruling elite was unable to offer a stable national identity" and Turkish nationalism thus remained latent.²⁷³ He

²⁶⁹ See Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*.

²⁷⁰ Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman legacy of Turkish modernity*: xiii.

²⁷¹ For a profound philosophical critique of this type of historiography see: Guha, *History at The Limit of World-history*.

²⁷² Ibid., 36.

²⁷³ Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic : Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*(New York: Zed Books, 2004), 52.

also maintains that “Turkish nationalism, as a political movement, arrived only in the 20th century.”²⁷⁴ Although the second assertion may not be inaccurate, the lack of political movement, per se, does not necessarily mean the lack of a national identity, “stable” or otherwise. As Chatterjee has shown, identifying nationalism as a political movement in and of itself is problematic and misleading.²⁷⁵

Akçam, in part, bases his claim on what he sees as the lack of the centrality of the ethnic Turk’s history in Ottoman literature, particularly in Ottoman textbooks prior to the 20th century.²⁷⁶ As shown in the following chapter, Turkishness and Turkification had a central role in the state’s educational project from the mid-1870s onward. It is striking that the multiethnic and multi-religious character of Ottoman society is seen as a major reason for the so-called Turkish lack of “self-consciousness” to use Lewis’s phrase. In fact, this very factor was one of the greatest internal threats to the Empire’s integrity. In his discussion on Habsburg and Russian Empires, Anderson shows that in the 19th century, such socio-political contexts were particularly conducive to the emergence of official nationalism.²⁷⁷ In essence, nationalism is dialectical and in the absence of the ethnic, cultural or religious Other, nationalist self-consciousness would not be possible.

Akçam enumerates a number of other reasons for the supposed absence of Turkish nationalism before 1912. It is not surprising, however, that Islam is cited as another important reason for this ‘latency’ since “in contrast to other Islamic countries, among the Ottomans,

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, 13.

²⁷⁶ Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (New York: Zed Books, 2004), 62.

²⁷⁷ See; Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 83-111.

Islamic identity developed in tandem with the lapse of any sense of Turkishness.”²⁷⁸ As banal as this might sound, many of the later Islamic countries were still domains of the Ottoman Empire. At best, Turkish nationalists, just like any other nationalists, could be oblivious to their own nationalism and “always seems to [have] locate[d] nationalism on the periphery.”²⁷⁹ Additionally, such an argument reveals an understanding of religion as a universal and uncontaminated phenomenon that is inherently resistant to the impact of any local or ethnic interpretations.

It is also important to state that from the 1840s on, the state/religious establishment underwent dramatic transformations as a result of the Ottoman state’s extensive reforms aiming towards the integration of non-Muslims. Henceforth, “managing religion” took a different form due to centralization policies, notwithstanding the fact that the state’s instrumental use of religion was not identical throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.²⁸⁰ In a way, the attempts by non-Turkish communities to differentiate Islam from Turkishness demonstrate the influence of such policies. As will be illustrated in the following chapters, some prominent Kurdish religious leaders were adamant about differentiating the two. The Kurds, whose nationalism was supposedly even more latent than that of the Turks, started separating their own Islamic identity from their Turkish co-religionists as early as 1880.²⁸¹ The renowned Kurdish Naqshbandi Leader, Sheikh Ubeydullah, in his letter to the foreign councils, went so far as to differentiate Kurdish religion from that of the Turks.²⁸² By the turn of the century, Turkish intellectuals were debating which choice suited

²⁷⁸ Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*, 63.

²⁷⁹ Billig’s statement is not specifically made about the Ottoman context. See, Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 5.

²⁸⁰ See Karpas (2005). Also, for more on religious management in the Ottoman Empire, especially from 1876 to the 1880s see, Zürcher (2010).

²⁸¹ See Chapters 5 & 6.

²⁸² Cf. Celîlê Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages from Kurdish People’s History*, trans. Hasan Kaya (Istanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 2007), 33-56.

the empire better: Pro-Muslim unity (*İttihad-î İslam*) or pro-racial unity (*İttihad-î Anasur*).²⁸³

The practical limitations of the ruling group, argues Akçam, was another reason for the latency of Turkish nationalism. He states that “the multinational character of the Ottoman state forced the ruling national group into a strange dilemma. Because the main goal had been the preservation of the multinational state, the members of the ruling nation could not openly claim their own national identities.”²⁸⁴ The “strange dilemma” of the ethnic Turks unveils the complexities of Turkish nationalism rather than the absence of Turkish national identity. There must be a difference between lacking a national identity and being reticent about its existence. The above complexities and dilemmas were rooted in the nature of official nationalism. Official nationalism, which fostered the “merger of nation and dynastic empire,”²⁸⁵ was a common trend, at least, in the late 19th century. “The key to situating ‘official nationalism’” argues Anderson, “is to remember that it developed *after*, and *in reaction to*, the popular national movements proliferating in Europe since the 1820s.”²⁸⁶

In the 19th century, Turkish nationalism, like that of other empires was, to borrow Krishan Kumar’s phrase, enigmatic, and had its own peculiarities. It exhibited some of the characteristics of English nationalism that are discussed by Kumar.²⁸⁷ This enigmatic aspect adds to the elusive and complex nature of empires’ nationalism that makes both denying it and situating it in the right historical context difficult.

What Kumar calls “missionary nationalism” is quite useful in understanding Turkish

²⁸³ Cf. Takin Alp, *Türkleştirme/ Turkification* (Istanbul: Resmli Ay, 1928), 3.

²⁸⁴ Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*: 65.

²⁸⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*: 86.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*: x-xi & 20.

nationalist tendencies in the early 19th century. One can say that like other imperial nationalisms, in its early periods, Ottoman/Turkish imperial nationalism was:

A type of nationalism [that rested] not so much on the nature of empire as a general political form as on the perceptions of particular groups within it. It is these groups that may exhibit 'missionary' nationalism, sometimes to the point of threatening the imperial structures that allow them this sense; and if, as several scholars claim, we can discern nations before nationalism, it may be that here we discern nationalism before nations.²⁸⁸

From the era of *Tanzimat* (reorganization and reforming the state structure), the state aimed at creating a cohesive society in which its members would feel a strong sense of belonging to the central state.²⁸⁹ This mission, for reforming the state and society, gained legitimacy under the rubric of *medeniyet* (civilization). As Karpas points out, the state began to perceive itself as the agent of *medeniyet*—a tool in the hands of bureaucrats and intelligentsia to create its own identity. Therefore, a centralized state was not only deemed as more modern institution capable of greater social and economic achievements, but was also seen as the legitimate agent that could guarantee the ruling group's supremacy.²⁹⁰ The state's civilizing practice or "borrowed colonialism...pushed [the non-Turkish] periphery ...into a colonial status."²⁹¹ Ottoman official nationalism in action is best described by Murat Ergin as "Defining the center into which all differences would assimilate; defining the boundaries of an unmarked territory into which all others would walk after leaving their particularities behind, produce a multitude of attempts to

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 30.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Şerif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey*, 1st ed.(Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

²⁹⁰ Karpas, *The Politicization of Islam : Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*, 11-12.

²⁹¹ Selim Deringil, "Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (Apr., 2003): 312-13.

invent 'us'.”²⁹² Hence, to defend the thesis of latency of the Turkish nationalism, one must, like Bernard Lewis, assume the “unconsciousness” and the innocence of these institutionalized practices.

As mentioned earlier, the Ottoman state was not alone in its undertaking of reform projects. This type of modernization and restructuring of the state was to follow along the lines of reforms that were taking place in Europe. In the early decades of the 19th century, the Ottoman state and, to a certain degree, the Qajars in Iran - though in a sluggish and much less orderly way - were also trying to adjust to the requirements of the new age. Centralization, in conjunction with a certain nationalist bent along the lines of the French Revolution, was the order of the day. In addition, the Ottoman state aimed to adopt “Civilization” with certain qualifications in order to remain viable and to be able to stave off mounting European aggression.

In the early 19th century, following the French model, European statesmen generally resorted to the strategic goal of centralizing the state and extending its control of the population, rather than adopting the systematic practice of imposing the ruling ethnic group's identity. It must be emphasized that “the project of building and shaping an identity is an aspect of nationalism.”²⁹³

The Ottoman state's population politics showcases a gradual and measured appearance of emphases on Turkishness. It must not be a mere accident that the French version of the 1844 census contains the hyphenated category of Turks-Ottomans (Türk-Osmanlı).²⁹⁴ In this

²⁹² Murat Ergin, "Chromatic Turkishness: Race, Modernity, and Western Scholars in the Construction of the Turkish National Identity " (Unpublished PhD dissertation, The University of Minnesota 2005), 138.

²⁹³ W. J. Norman, *Negotiating Nationalism: Nation-Building, Federalism, and Secession in the Multinational State*(Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 26.

²⁹⁴ Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi : İttihat Ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği, 1913-1918/ the Code of Modern Turkey*, Araştırma-Inceleme Dizisi (Cagaloglu, Istanbul: İletisim, 2008), 89.

classification, Türk-Osmanlı was clearly distinguished from other ethnic groups such as Albanians, Arabs, Kurds and so forth.²⁹⁵ These policies were not devised as outright Turkism. However, they aimed to obfuscate the nationalism of the Other. Like European states, “what mattered to them was the Napoleonic example of imposing legal and administrative uniformity as a way of eliminating ‘the dangers of anti-national, regional or ethnic identities.’”²⁹⁶ Even though the ruling ethnicity did not declare the state identity to be coterminous with its own, since the state was the agent of propagating its own culture, language, and conception of the state and society, the centralized state was also, in the end, a nationalizing agent. Ottoman Turks’ attitudes in “the beginning of the age of nationalism” and their hesitation to declare their own ethnic identity as the identity of the sovereign much resembles the attitude of Germans in the Habsburg Empire.²⁹⁷ However, Turkish language and culture, as the predominant language and culture of the state, like “German [in the Hapsburg Empire] increasingly acquired a double status: ‘universal-imperial’ and ‘particular-national’.”²⁹⁸ Although the ruling ethnic group may have exhibited a certain degree of reticence in declaring the sovereign’s ethnicity in the beginning of the 19th century, no dominated groups were hesitant to call them Turks.²⁹⁹ The Turks, as guardians of their Empire, conceived of a stronger centralized state as a solution to the threat posed by the development of other ethnic nationalisms. Even in its early stages, Ottomanism was seen as a compensation for possible Turkish reticence to self-identify publicly, since it could help to forge

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Wolf explaining state centralization policies in France. Quoted in Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*: 32.

²⁹⁷ Murat Belge, "Genç Kalemler and Turkish Nationalism,," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity : Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Kerem Öktem, Celia Kerslake, and Philip Robins(Basingstoke England ; New York Oxford in association with St Antony's College: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 28.

²⁹⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*: 85.

²⁹⁹ Belge, "Genç Kalemler and Turkish Nationalism,," 28.

a unifying identity under the patronage of the state, which, according to Karpaz, had long emphasized its own Turkish character. Karpaz maintains that

in truth, the language of the Ottoman state always was Turkish, and the *Enderun*, the famous palace school that trained top-level administrators used Turkish as the language of instruction throughout its existence. It is not surprising, therefore, that these facts supplied the arguments to claim that political leadership in the Ottoman state had always been 'Turkish.'³⁰⁰

As indicated in the outset, in the scholarship on Ottoman history, there is a great deal of resistance to the possibility of the existence of Muslim nationalism prior to First World War. The Republican historiography is based on the denial of the preexistence of Turkish nationalism. The early republican ideologues tried to define themselves as the real messengers of Turkish nationalism, claiming that it was completely distinct from Ottomanism. To justify this discourse of rupture and the absolute lack of affinity with the recent past, early Republican historiography strives to show that Republican ideologues created their nationalism *ex nihilo*.³⁰¹ Yet, there exist, at least two readings of the late Ottoman era by ideologues of Turkish nationalism, and these readings have affected Ottoman historians' views as well. History writing is not easily freed from the impact of official accounts. At best, it remains a criticism of state narratives, whose content, according to Hegel, "not only lends itself to the prose of history but actually helps to produce it."³⁰²

In the early Republican period, nationalists strove to completely distance themselves from the recent Ottoman past. Therefore, they categorically denied the existence of Turkish

³⁰⁰ Karpaz, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*: 14.

³⁰¹ Cf. Ergin, "Chromatic Turkishness: Race, Modernity, and Western Scholars in the Construction of Turkish National Identity ".

³⁰² Guha, *History at The Limit of World-history*: 15.

nationalism in the pre-CUP era. By labeling the CUP period an era of catastrophes and treason, they further dissociate themselves from it.³⁰³ Thus, “it is possible [to] argue that the Republican regime in general projected an image of the entire late Ottoman period as the historical ‘other’.”³⁰⁴ This radical rereading of past takes place, in Shissler’s terms, as part of the process of “the transformation of nationalism into Kemalism,”³⁰⁵ by the expurgation of nationalism in the pre-Republican history. Kemalism consolidates its power by reinterpreting the past to settle its present internal conflicts and to readjust itself, through the state, in accordance with new geopolitical realities.

Republican ideologues, as illustrated in Tekin Alp’s writings, were adamant about renouncing late Ottoman history and characterizing it a wholly religious other.³⁰⁶ For instance, Alp claims that Ottomanism lacked the capacity to become an inclusive system. The multiethnic character of late Ottoman society, Alp claims, was the source of discriminatory practices, as opposed to inclusive Republican nationalism.³⁰⁷ In his 1927 work, *Türkleştirme/Turkification*, Alp refers to Republican nationalism as a melting pot in which people’s ethnic and religious backgrounds—once prominent in the Ottoman system—were to dissipate in the new era.³⁰⁸ Alp categorically denies that Ottomanism had any nationalist elements. He contends that “in the era of *Türklük* (Turkishness),” i.e.; Republican nationalism, “concepts such as Muslim and non-Muslim or subject and non-subject cease to exist. Every individual’s membership in the nation is

³⁰³ Shissler, *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Agaoglu and the New Turkey*.

³⁰⁴ Ergin, "Chromatic Turkishness: Race, Modernity, and Western Scholars in the Construction of Turkish National Identity " 90.

³⁰⁵ Shissler, *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Agaoglu and the New Turkey*: 24.

³⁰⁶ Cf. Alp, *Türkleştirme/ Turkification*.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 20.

actualized with her/his service to the nation.”³⁰⁹ According to Alp, such categories belong to the past. They would no longer determine the people’s social standing or citizenship.³¹⁰

Setting aside the inaccuracy of Alp’s claim, in theory the *Tanzimat* reforms (in the 19th century) were also introduced to universalize Ottomanness as the sole identity of all Ottoman subjects. Makdisi argues that the Ottoman “official nationalism launched in the wake of the *Tanzimat* was a project of modernization that strove to cohere different ethnic groups, different religious communities, different regions, and, above all, different stages of progress within a unified Ottoman modernity.”³¹¹ Yet, a unified Ottoman modernity the Republican ideologues claimed to have obscured Turkishness.

Alp contends that the definition of Turkishness in the Ottoman context was a confused one. This was the case since anyone who converted to Islam or was already a Muslim was also considered a Turk.³¹² For Alp, this implies that the identity of the ruling ethnic group was a solely religious one; Turkish ethnicity had become invisible.

Fuat Dündar has shown that as early as the 1840s, Ottoman state statistics demonstrate frequent instances of the ethnic classification of the polity³¹³ and Ottomanism was not an equalizing concept. The late 19th century Ottoman intellectuals were generally hesitant to equate their own modernized Islamic understanding with that of the “savage” periphery.³¹⁴ Moreover, despite the importance of religious identity in both the pre-Republican and Republican eras,

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 20.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

³¹¹ Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 779.

³¹² Alp, *Türkleştirme. Turkification*: 34.

³¹³ See chapter one in Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi : İttihat ve Terakki'nin etnisite mühendisliği, 1913-1918/ The Code of Modern Turkey*.

³¹⁴ Cf. Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 781-88.

religion was never the singular marker of identity in Ottoman Turkey. Nonetheless, from the early *Tanzimat* era onward, Islam ultimately becomes a greater instrument of government in the hands of the dominant ethnic group³¹⁵ to justify its rule and to assimilate dominated populations.³¹⁶ Yet, in the Republican reading of Ottoman history, as articulated by Alp, the Turks were victims of their religiosity: they “were supposed to be the ruling ethnic group [but in reality they] were the most forgotten one in this vast and borderless Empire.”³¹⁷

According to Alp, the lack of nationalism in the later Ottoman period, in part, was because the Turks did not play their role as a majority and therefore could not suppress non-Turkish ethnic politics. The Turks, in his words, did not have *tehekkum*, coercive rule, due to their lack of cohesive (*bir hahlde olmayinda*) national consciousness.³¹⁸ To Alp, the sheer inability of the Ottoman Turks to assimilate the rest of the population attests to their lack of national consciousness.

Tehekkum, according to Alp, is a manifestation of the will of the majority imposed on minorities. As such, the majority “should crush” a minority if it resists the will of the majority.³¹⁹ Contrary to the Ottoman period, which was plunged in ominous (*menhus*) ethnicity politics, the new Turkey will not allow ethnic policies to surface.³²⁰ In the new Turkey, national life (*milli hayat*), for those who wish to be a part of it, leaves no choice but to become a Turk.³²¹ This

³¹⁵ It was Mahmud II (1789-1839) who—in order to turn it into an actual state apparatus—incorporated the office of *Shaikh al-Islam*, the highest clerical position in *Sunni* Islam, into the state bureaucracy.

³¹⁶ Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 769.

³¹⁷ Alp, *Türkleştirme/ Turkification*, 18.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.* One should remember that this type of nationalism has been lauded by scholars such as Berkes (1965), Lewis (1961) and Landau as a civic, non-racial and non-ethnic, nationalism.

national life is a forceful imposition of the majority's will and its identity. In the words of the first prime minister of the Republic, İsmet İnönü, it is "the mission for Turkifying whoever lives on this land regardless of the cost."³²²

Certainly, there are some novel approaches to the rule of majority, as posited by Alp, which became the public discourse of the state after 1909. In Abdülhamid's period the state had declared privileging Turkish as a right, and had Turkified education and the language of bureaucracy, but had not gone so far as to declare that all its citizens were either Turks or that they had to become Turks.³²³ The Republican nationalism was exceptionally bold and certainly had no chance for success in earlier periods. This new nationalist discourse was adamant and unequivocal about its assimilationist character while simultaneously claiming to be inclusive. It was overtly racial and entailed an outright denial of the other. However, it always remained vigilant against other nationalisms and crushed and labeled them as "exclusionary and retrograde (*irtca-i*).³²⁴ This nationalist discourse was unprecedented in late Ottoman history, at least until the end of the Hamidian period.

It is important to note that Republican ideologues were not alone in their dissatisfaction with nationalism in their imperial past. It seems that no nationalizing tendencies have been considered satisfactory by the succeeding radical statist/nationalist generations since they created a particular dilemma for the ruling elite, who can be seen as both champions and traitors. Comparing the later rereading of this situation in both Ottoman and Hapsburg contexts, Anderson maintains that "In much the same way [as the Hapsburgs], the Ottomans came to be hated by the Turkish-speakers as apostates and by the non-Turkish-speakers as Turkifiers."³²⁴

³²² Alp, *Türkleştirme/ Turkification*, 32.

³²³ See the following sections.

³²⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*: 85.

It is not a matter of little significance, however, that prior to the Republican period major Turkist and nationalist ideologues like Yusuf Akçuraoglu (1876- 1932) and Ziya Gökalp (1876- 1924) not only acknowledge some type of state nationalism in the *Tanzimat* era, but also declare that one of the ultimate goals behind the *Tanzimat* reforms was the assimilation of non-Turkish subjects. To them, the *Tanzimat* reforms represented the state's homogenizing policies in disguise.

Some aspects of Ottoman official nationalism did not escape Akçuraoglu's keen eyes, as he declared that the French model was ineffective in solving the crisis of the Ottoman state.³²⁵ In his words, in the 1850s, the Ottoman state adopted the policy of assimilation (*temsil*) of the dominated ethnic and religious communities in the hope of unification of the elements (*imtizaj*).³²⁶ In fact, Akçuraoglu refers to a type of missionary nationalism that had been adopted by Ottoman political leaders mostly in the mid-19th century.³²⁷ In his *Üç Tarz-i Siyaset*,³²⁸ initially published in 1904, Akçuraoglu refers to Ottomanism as a failed policy; he sees the pre-Hamidian period as the origin of this type of politics.

It was an era of the French type of missionary nationalism, which Akçuraoglu considered to be misdirected. Unlike the German type, which conformed to his more recent views on nationalism, the French model did not emphasize racial and linguistic factors. To him, a proper and realistic Turkish nationalism would be a type that was based on Turkish ethnicity with no considerations for geographical boundaries.³²⁹ This was in contradiction to the views of the

³²⁵ Yusuf Akçuraoglu, *Üç Tarz-I Siyaset/ Three Types of Politics* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Kadir, 1327/1911), 3-7.

³²⁶ "İttihadi 'Enasur Meselesi/ the Question of the Ethnic Elements' Unification " *Sirat-i Mustaqim* 5, no. 121 (1910): 280-83.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Akçuraoglu, *Üç Tarz-I Siyaset/ Three Types of Politics*.

³²⁹ Ibid., 5-6.

earlier elite and statesmen, who attempted to forge an identity for Ottoman subjects with no overt emphases on ‘*irk* (ethnicity).³³⁰ The earlier Ottoman statesmen were emphatic about their mission to keep the empire intact by entrenching an identity that could supplant all types of religious and ethnic loyalties except for the one desired by the state.

Drafting a constitution and creating a parliament was long considered vital to the Ottoman state’s world standing. The state was intent upon readjusting itself with its status in the new world system, and to legally move beyond the social division inherent in the entrenched culture of the former *millet* system. However, Ali Paşa, a powerful statesman in the 1850s, whom Akçuraoglu considers to be one of the greatest proponents of Ottomanism,³³¹ vehemently opposed this idea. He rightly argued that a constitution and representative assembly would grant a political platform to the very people whose secessionist tendencies were a threat to the Empire.³³² Makdisi points out the Ottoman paradox in the 19th century: the state tried to integrate the periphery, but the very attempt of integration for their assimilatory nature caused further segregation between the center and the periphery.³³³ Indeed, the real reason behind the façade of religious equality was to remove differences at the expense of dominated groups. An Ottoman statesman such as Ali Paşa knew that instead of eliminating differences, a constitution very well legalize them and strengthen the budding nationalistic desires present in dominated communities. Undoubtedly, the Great Powers, such as Britain, France, and Russia were also keenly aware of this fact and therefore they increasingly pressured the Ottomans for reforms they hoped would make the Ottoman empire more open to the capitalist market, and more open to a process that

³³⁰ *İrk*, is generally translated as race. However, in this context ethnicity seems to be a better rendition.

³³¹ Ibid., 5.

³³² Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought : A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, 19.

³³³ Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 770.

would result in the eventual disintegration of the empire by way of “according autonomy and independence to its Christian subjects, whose middle class had developed substantially.”³³⁴

The Ottoman fear of the non-dominant groups’ nationalism was real and present. It is clear which groups would see themselves as the beneficiaries of a possible state disintegration and why. Therefore “[a]lthough empires usually have recognizably dominant ethnic groups – Germans, Russians, Turks – to identify the empire with these groups would risk bitter resentment and possibly dissolution.”³³⁵ When an ethnic group is privileged and dominant, it would be unwise on its part to trumpet its own privileged position and cause unwarranted challenges. Thus, “[r]uling groups are aware of the need to distance themselves from any one ethnicity, to appear, at least, impartial as between the various peoples that make up the empire.”³³⁶

To come back to pre-Republican readings of the late-Ottoman history, a Turkist thinker such as Akçuraoglu was able to see beyond the guise of so called Ottomanist and “pan-Islamist” policies. Akçuraoglu considered these policies to be genuine attempts to save the Ottoman state. Yet, he believed they were outdated and unpersuasive as ideologies, since he asserted that ethnicity did not constitute the pillar of these policies.³³⁷ Thus, when Akçuraoglu critiques pan-Islamist policies or emphasizes Turkism, he should not be necessarily seen as anti-religious.³³⁸ However, as a statist nationalist, he no longer believed in defining the identity of the sovereign as Islamic or Ottoman rather than Turkish (let’s assume the last two are different). In the age of

³³⁴ Karpas, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*: 4.

³³⁵ Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*: 30.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Akçuraoglu, *Üç Tarz-I Siyaset/ Three Types of Politics*, 16-28.

³³⁸ For a very interesting discussion on figures like Yusuf Akçuraoglu see Shissler’s introduction in: Shissler, *Between Two Empires: Ahmet Agaoglu and the New Turkey*.

nationalism, argued Akçuraoglu, neither Ottomanism nor Islamism could save the empire, which was seen as the common strategic goal of all those policies.

In brief, Yusuf Akçuraoglu intended to make clear the unrealistic nature of the two approaches that were previously devised and adopted in the hope of saving the Ottoman Empire. Since neither Ottomanism nor Pan-Islamism were publicly advocating “race” as the basis for defining national identity, they were both inefficacious.³³⁹ He unequivocally “sought the eventual dominance of Turkism and the transformation of the Ottoman State into a Turkish homeland.”³⁴⁰

Ziya Gökalp makes a similar observation with respect to the real aims of the *Tanzimat* reforms. Until 1912, when the state lost almost all of its European lands in the Balkan Wars, he still hoped that the political ideology of Ottomanism might someday come to fruition. However, as early as 1913, Gökalp expressed his disillusionment, noting “...that *Tanzimat* leaders³⁴¹ and Young Turks were not sincere in their recognition of the rights of the various communities, but used the ideal of Ottomanism as a cloak for the Turkification of the state.”³⁴² Gökalp goes a step

³³⁹ Akçuraoglu, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset/ Three Types of Politics*, 16-28.

³⁴⁰ Karpat, *Studies on Turkish Politics and Society: Selected Articles and Essays*, 206-07.

³⁴¹ There is no doubt that Gökalp was much critical of previous Turkish generations. Yet, at the same time, his readings of the Ottoman past was much more complex than that of the later republican ideologues'. Like his contemporaries, Gökalp was also in a soul searching mode and therefore his nationalism was shaped by his opposition to the recent Ottoman past. Therefore, his rereading of the past was overly paradoxical. Gökalp criticized the Pro-*Tanzimat* officials for their secretive assimilatory policies or their lack of public emphasis on Turkishness, for relegating the economic arena to the non-Turks and for their overreliance on bureaucrats (*idareciler*) instead of the common people. The latter which according to him was detrimental to Turkishness. For instance, he claims that

the Turks' abstention from the ideal of nationality was both harmful for the state and troublesome for the ethnic groups and was fatal to the existence of Turkishness. Because they considered nationality as a living nation [of which] the state [was an embodiment], the Turks did not know that their social and economic existence was degenerating. While economic and social domination was shifting to other elements [*unsurlar*: ethnic groups], the Turks were unable to see that they were losing something; because from their perspective those [elements] were nothing more than the classes of which the Ottoman nation was made up. Ziya Gökalp, *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak / Turkification, Islamization, Modernization*(Ankara,: Akçağ Basım, 1960), 13.

³⁴² Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp*(London: Luzac, 1950), 73.

further and introduces the entire enterprise of Ottomanism as well-thought out state policy for assimilating non-Turks as he declares that

The reformists (*Tanzimatçılar*) tried to disguise Turkishness. There was not a national Turkish language; Ottoman was the interethnic (*unsurlar arası*) common language. By comingling all the elements, they were trying to create a new national breed (*bir kavmi tip*), a historical race, a derivative (*türemiş*) Ottoman nation. Just as the new nation would have had a unique language, it also would have owned a unique history. No ethnic group was deceived by such a lie. In their own schools, every ethnic group taught their children their own history and language.³⁴³

With the progression of time, as Gökalp insinuates, Turkification became a major concern for non-Turks. He contends that

in the aftermath of Constitutionalism,[from the perspective of the state] this mask [Turkification] gained more significance; ethnic groups began to shout “you are trying to Turkify us.” In reality this Ottomanization policy was a disguised instrument for the Turkification³⁴⁴ [of non-Turks]... Since Ottoman was nothing other than the Turkish language, then, if the goal was to create a nation whose language was Ottoman, this new nation would be a Turkish nation, only with a different name.³⁴⁵

In reality, as shown in the following chapter, Ottoman officials were much bolder on the Turkish language than Gökalp gives them credit for. Ottoman administrative documents show that state officials were not at all reticent either to call the state’s language Turkish or to make it a compulsory subject of study. Even though Gökalp rejects this type of Turkification for its secretive nature, he acknowledges the existence of Turkism (*Türkçülük*) in other forms, for example, in real language reform tendencies propagated by intellectuals. The prior existence of this Turkist tradition is essential for Gökalp, because without it even modern Turkey would not be possible. Gökalp thus asks what would have happened after the fall of the Empire,

if Turkism had not left many of us with a unique national life, separate from the Ottoman Empire, [or with] a homeland with its boundaries drawn in accordance to the

³⁴³ Gökalp, *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak / Turkification, Islamization, Modernization*, 38.

³⁴⁴ *Gerçekten bu Osmanlılaştırmak Siyaseti Türkleştirmek için Gizli bir Vasıttan İbaretti.*

³⁴⁵ Gökalp, *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak / Turkification, Islamization, Modernization*, 38.

science of ethnography, [or with] an independent will that signifies our national right?³⁴⁶

In Gökalp's opinion, all this indicates that if the Turks had used "the sacred (*mukkades*) and auspicious (*mübarek*) word *Türk*" to refer to themselves, there would not be any confusion.³⁴⁷

When did Turkism emerge and how it was disseminated among the Turks? Gökalp opines that the appearance of Turkism in the Empire coincides with the creation of modern schools. This is what Anderson calls "Hobsbawm's dictum that 'the progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism'..."³⁴⁸ To Gökalp, these new institutions signified the dysfunction of the old ones, which in turn represented the unsuitability of the old socio-religious bonds among Turks. In Gökalp's own terms:

The first fathers of Turkism (*Türkçülük*) were two [mid-19th century] institutions of ours: Darülfünun and the Academy of War (*Mektebi Askeriye*). It would not have been possible to open Darülfünun, if the *Medrese* [the traditional school system] could have preserved its strength... Turkish feelings of a bond with the *Umma* too began to fade away. The renewed attempts to reorganize Darülfünun and the Academy of War in the last years of the reign of Sultan Abdulaziz (1839-1876) were again an indication of the weakening of the [Turkish] bonds with [the Islamic *Umma*].³⁴⁹

Akçuraoglu and Gökalp's designation of the preceding generation of Ottoman statesmen as masked nationalists is worth noting, particularly because claims about the latency of Turkish nationalism and its sudden appearance in 1908 or 1912 fail to see the complexities of the official nationalism. Instead of perpetuating this claim, it is more helpful to pay attention to how Turkish nationalism was formulated during and after the *Tanzimat* era, be it Ottomanism, "pan-Islamism" or an outright Turkism.

Abdülhamid II's policies, in many ways, were the culmination of this trend, i.e.

³⁴⁶ *Türkçülüğün Esasları/ the Principles of Turkism*(Ankara: Yeni Metbaa, 1950), 38.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 71.

³⁴⁹ Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları/ the Principles of Turkism*, 57.

Ottomanism, which had started long before he came to power. Ottomanism was a policy to end the traditional state-subject relationship which had differentiated Ottoman subjects based on their religious affiliations. The Ottoman elite declared their intention to rectify inequalities among subjects stemming from the fact that their rights and social standing were directly affected by their religious faith. In the mid-19th century, Ottoman leaders were supposed to grant subjects equal legal protection regardless of their religious backgrounds. It was declared “that all the subjects of the one state are members of the same nation.”³⁵⁰ This is how the state-religion relationship was to be replaced by that of state-nationality. Such policies aimed at redefining the Ottoman subject's relationship to the state-nation, and shifting their loyalties and obligations away from communal and religious identities. This shift in the state's emphasis, as Karpāt convincingly argues, “inadvertently moved toward giving political expression to the individual's primordial identities within the nation-state. This individualistic orientation, however, arose within the organizational and institutional framework of the ‘Turks’ political culture, which was premised partly on the supremacy of state authority.”³⁵¹

In its essence, this modern redefinition of the subject under the guise of Ottomanism naturally resulted in the redefinition of the sovereign, by which the traditional Muslim-Turk was replaced by the Turk. As such, Turkishness was no longer simply the sovereign's incidental ethnic lineage; it became the source of politico-cultural restructuring of society. The emphases on markers of Turkish identity were becoming clearer by the 1870s—the first constitutional era. In the second half of the 19th century the idea of racial and linguistic unity beyond the state's

³⁵⁰ Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp*, 72.

³⁵¹ Karpāt, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*: 9.

boundary was gaining currency.³⁵² Sati' al-Husry asserts that *al-istitrak*, Turkification,³⁵³ of the language, was popular only among small circles of literati. It began with the *Tanzimat* reforms and was later followed by the Turkification of history and the state.³⁵⁴ Şerif Mardin has shown the significance of Young Ottoman works in their use and revival of the Turkish vernacular along with their romantic nationalism. Namik Kemal, who in 1872 declared “the desired future prosperity of the Islamic caliphate will be the contribution of the Turks in the first degree,”³⁵⁵ was a Young Ottoman poet whose “patriotic poetry [was] filled with exhortations to save [the] fatherland...”³⁵⁶ He was even more rigorous than his “precursors [in his efforts for] the simplification of the Turkish language.”³⁵⁷

It was against this background of the increasing emphasis on the ruling group’s ethnic identity that the 1876 Ottoman constitution declared Turkish as the official language of the Empire. However, despite this new legal and social valorization of and status conferred upon the Turkish language, and naturally upon its speakers in the multilingual Ottoman society, major components of *Tanzimat* reforms remained intact. Some issues were religiously more expedient to ignore; for example, “the principle of Ottomanism and equality of all regardless of religion was established

³⁵² Ergin, "Chromatic Turkishness: Race, Modernity, and Western Scholars in the Construction of Turkish National Identity " 152.

³⁵³ As a policy, if it refers to something other than the politics of language, *al-istitrak* could mean the will to become a Turk or self-Turkification, since it contains the element of volition as opposed to *al-tatrik*, which is forcible and means to forcefully turn a non-Turk into a Turk.

³⁵⁴ Abu Khaldun Stai' Al-Husri, *Muhadarat Fi Nushu' Al-Fikrah Al-Qawmiyah/ Lectures on the Idea of Nationalism*(al-Qahirah: Matba'ah al-Risalah, 1951), 126-27.

³⁵⁵ Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 771.

³⁵⁶ Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought : A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*: 283.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

with the inclusion of non-Muslims deputies...³⁵⁸

The 1876 Constitution, even though it was soon to be overridden by the Sultan's autocratic policies, still carried the goals and the ethos of *Tanzimat* and Ottomanism. The constitution was the legacy of bureaucrats and did not reflect the aspirations of Ottoman society at large "but [was a tool] designed to reshape society and legitimize control of government power."³⁵⁹

The first Ottoman constitution as well as the Sultan's so-called pan-Islamist policies should be looked at as political strategies devised as responses to increasing internal and external pressure that forced the state to reformulate its strategy of survival. However, on the whole, this strategy signified the increasing political will of the state to reshape its own society and to stave off increasing foreign pressures. As such, in addition to the reorganization of the state bureaucracy, the elites hoped to bring legitimacy to the state both internally and internationally. These changes had a long lasting impact on Ottoman-Turkish politics and thus understanding this era accurately is key to our understanding of the later Republican period.³⁶⁰ Abdülhamid II was the supreme player in this environment and his policies should be seen in this new context of ever dominating Turkish official nationalism.

³⁵⁸ Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, 1902-1910* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 41. Also, see, Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period : A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament*.

³⁵⁹ Karpas, *Studies on Turkish Politics and Society: Selected Articles and Essays*, 201.

³⁶⁰ See, *ibid*. Also, Erik-Jan Zürcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Celia Kerslake Kerem Öktem, Philip Robins (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Chapter 4

Abdülhamid II's pan-Islamism/ Nationalism

Abdülhamid II's pan-Islamism was not a revival of Islam as a religion per se;³⁶¹ it was the revival of Muslim subjects' political identity within a Turkish cultural context inside Ottoman boundaries. It should also be viewed as an attempt to create a unified stance against European colonialism. However, the religious discourse of the state and the reinvigoration of an Islamic identity was one of the most effective strategies that the Hamidian state had adopted for the survival of the empire. This is how Abdülhamid II tried to veil the state's official nationalism internally and to preserve the Empire's universalist image in the Muslim world at large. To explain the façade of an 'Islamic revival' within a Turkish cultural framework, we shall attend to three important components of the Ottoman official nationalism: Ottoman Islam and linguistic nationalism, the history of educational and linguistic Turkification, and nationalism and the politics of pan-Islamism.

1. Official language and Turkification

³⁶¹ In 1898, the writers of the Arabic *el-Kanunü'l-Esasi*, a CUP publication, sent a lengthy open letter to Sultan Abdulhamid II. While the Sultan claimed to be the Caliph and strove to unite the Muslim world, the letter mocked his religious integrity. It aimed at exposing the Sultan's hypocritical attitudes by asking how can he simultaneously claim to be the Caliph and yet be so lax in practicing the daily prayers that are required of every single Muslim. "How can you skip Friday prayer," asks the letter, "for your wasteful parties in the palace?" "You have become a source of embarrassment for the Turkish *Umma*." See, *el-Kanunü'l-Esasi = la Constitution* (no: 7, 1898), 3.

Anderson's insights with respect to other empires are also applicable to Ottoman official nationalism. As noted before,³⁶² reflecting on the unfolding official nationalism of the Hapsburg empire, Anderson claims that German was "increasingly acquiring a double status: 'universal-Imperial' and 'particular-national.'" ³⁶³ It seems that in the Ottoman case, both Islam and Turkish acquired a similar double status: Turkish-Islam among Muslim subjects, and Turkish among all Ottoman subjects. Islam represented this double status of the Ottoman Empire as Turkishness increasingly fused into official Islam. The double status persisted with a greater public emphasis on Islam along with a gradual shrinkage of public space for the manifestation of non-Turkish identities. Moreover, Ottoman officials increasingly Ottomanized Islam in tandem with rigorous attempts at civilizing the periphery.³⁶⁴ The Ottoman elite or "the White [Men] wearing a fez,"³⁶⁵ as Deringil labels them, progressively strove to turn Islam into a colonizing instrument.³⁶⁶ Ottoman Islam gradually became infused with Turkishness and, according to Deringil, became "the condition of the difference" between the center and the periphery. It should be indicated that Turkishness and Islam had been mingled long before Abdülhamid II's accession to power, but not the way that some orientalist scholars have conceived of it.³⁶⁷ Also, Islam, in the pre-Republican period, did not make the Turks unconscious of their ethnic identity. On the contrary, Ottoman archival documents and papers reveal that the Turks were quite conscious of their ethnicity. For

³⁶² See, the preceding chapter.

³⁶³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*: 84-5.

³⁶⁴ See. Selim Deringil, "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (Apr., 2003).

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 312.

³⁶⁶ See *ibid.* Also, Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism."

³⁶⁷ See: Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*.

the Ottoman elite, Turkish language literacy was a criterion by which they could sometimes determine the degree of non-Turkish subjects' loyalty. Inability to speak Turkish could be viewed both as a sign of backwardness and of disloyalty to the state. For example, in 1889 a protracted dispute between Christian and Muslim subjects resulted in the replacement of the bishop in Çeşme/Izmir. The bishop is referred to as one of the actors behind the prolongation of this dispute. He is accused of being under the influence of sources with "evil intentions" and is alluded to as someone who "did not even know Turkish (*Türkçe bile bilmeyen*)."³⁶⁸

Conceiving of Turkish as a factor that could ensure Ottoman subjects' Muslimness (or Ottomanness, in the case of non-Muslims) seems to have had long roots in the *Tanzimat* period. Subjects who were not fluent in Turkish were seen as being amenable to foreign influence. Ottoman archival documents explicitly state that this language gap could represent both religious and political dangers.³⁶⁹ From the perspective of the elite, a person or a group who did not know Turkish could readily adopt non-Muslim culture, especially in the European side of the Ottoman territories.³⁷⁰ This notion of Turkishness becomes the intersection of Islam and nationalism, as Turkish language was perceived as a protecting shield against foreign cultural invasion. An 1865 report by the inspector of the Third Army explains why Turkish, "the sublime language of the state,"³⁷¹ should be taught in Kigalık and Toskalık, part of Ottoman territory in Europe.³⁷² This document is evidence that even in the *Tanzimat* era, the Ottoman state considered other religions as threats to its integrity. Additionally, the report not only underscores the centrality of Turkish to

³⁶⁸ BOA: Dosya No: 1599, Gömlek No: 10, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 26/C /1306 (Hicrî) [27.02.1889].

³⁶⁹ Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 1015, Gömlek No: 70, Fon Kodu: MVL, Tarih: 23/S /1282 (Hicrî) [16.07.1865].

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ *Develetin lisani alisli olan.*

³⁷² BOA: Dosya No: 1015, Gömlek No: 70, Fon Kodu: MVL, Tarih: 23/S /1282 (Hicrî) [16.07.1865].

official policy, but also reveals the connections made between Turkish language and Islam. It is stated that because of their lack of Turkish literacy, most of the people in that region had embraced Greek costumes (*meşreb*) and religion, which could result in grave consequences for the state.³⁷³ At the end, the report recommends the instruction of the “sublime language of the state” as a panacea. The inspector, along with other officials in the region, proposes Turkish instruction as the best deterrent to the infiltration of foreign religion and culture and therefore to a potential loss of those territories.³⁷⁴ It is clear that the Ottoman elite’s perception of Turkish, both as a unifying factor and, more interestingly, as a proselytizing medium, goes back as far as the 1860s. As stated, all high-ranking local Ottoman officials unanimously held that the Turkish language could safeguard both Islam and Ottoman lands in those regions.³⁷⁵ Hence, these officials unanimously wrote the Minister of Education about the vital role of Turkish instruction in halting the people’s assimilation into a non-Muslim culture.³⁷⁶ This document reinforces the idea that the Ottoman elite had misgivings about the way Islam was understood and practiced in the periphery.³⁷⁷

The Ottoman elite’s attitudes legitimated the civilizing role of Islam in the center.³⁷⁸ Furthermore, it underscores the fact that in the *Tanzimat* period Islam continued to be a major component of Ottomanism and remained an important aspect of the Empire’s identity. This not

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid. The report reveals that the letter was jointly written by the inspector of the Third Army, the governors of Rumeli and Yanya, and the lieutenant governor of İşkodra and Tırhala.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ For more see, Şerif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?," *Post-Traditional Societies* 102, no. 1 (Winter, 1973).

³⁷⁸ See, Ibid; Deringil, "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery."; Also, Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism."

only demonstrates an embedded utilitarian view about Islam, but also throws the inclusiveness of Ottomanism into question. The ethnic bent of Ottomanist Islam becomes particularly clear in the context of official reliance on the Turkish language as a vital medium for the spread of Islam, especially in the Empire's European domain.

In the eyes of the Ottoman elite, the nature of Islamic understanding in the periphery was located outside the cultural framework of Turkishness. This view constituted the locus of the Ottoman Turkish elite's specific mission and unique role.³⁷⁹ The aforementioned examples illustrate that the elite saw themselves as the only capable agent for a true interpretation of Islam; an interpretation that, among other things, generally takes places in accordance with the Empire's interest and integrity. Strong support for this interpretation can be found in Namik Kemal's poem, *Vatan*, which advocates the elimination of any non-Turkish language to ensure the unity of the homeland.³⁸⁰ Turks were perceived as being different from all other Muslims. Thus, within Ottoman-Turkish Islamic discourse, agency is completely stripped from the periphery, as Ottoman-Turks exclusively bore the responsibility for modernizing Islam and society. In the early 1870s, Namik Kemal was explicit about the central role of Turks in the Empire. Despite their past contribution to the Muslim world, Kemal could only imagine Arabs as passive beneficiaries of the Turkish contribution to the "future prosperity of the Islamic caliphate."³⁸¹ Though religious discourse was dominant, especially during the reign of Abdülhamid II, ignoring the nationalist character of this Islamic discourse obscures our understanding of what was really

³⁷⁹ The Russian Orthodoxy exhibited similar characteristics. Russians elite too believed that they were burdened with the mission of preserving Orthodox Christianity. For a fascinating discussion on this subject see, Nikolai Berdiyev, *The Origin of Russian Communism* (London, G. Bles, 1948).

³⁸⁰ Mesut Yeğen in his introduction to Mehmet Bayrak, *Şark Islahat Planı Kürtlere Vurulan Kelepçe/ the Eastern Reform Plan and Shackling the Kurds*, Özge Yayınlar (Beysukent, Ankara: Özge, 2009), 13.

³⁸¹ Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 771.

going on. State discourse emphasized Islam as the common bond, but “ultimately justified Ottoman Turkish rule over Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, over Arabs, Armenians, Kurds, Bulgarians, etc.”³⁸²

During the first constitutional period, the Ottoman elite “had a clear notion that the Turks constituted the ‘fundamental element’ (*unsur-u asli*) of the empire,”³⁸³ a belief that even the Sultan was not hesitant to express.³⁸⁴ Abdülhamid II himself believed in the instrumentality of Islam for assimilating the non-Turkish populations, such as that of the Kurds, especially in Anatolia. The Sultan’s remark that “we need to strengthen the Turkish element in Anatolia and [at the same time] give priority to making the Kurds part of us”³⁸⁵ clearly reveals the Ottoman state’s ethnic assimilationist policies.

In the eyes of the Ottoman elite, the gap between Turks and other Muslims was significant. To Ottoman officials like Osman Nuri Paşa, the Vali of Hijaz, only non-Turks’ abandonment of their identity—which the Ottomans generally viewed as mere manifestations of savagery and backwardness—could bridge this gap.³⁸⁶ What Makdisi calls “Ottoman Orientalism” can be situated in this very perception of the other, which was nurtured within Ottoman Islamic discourse.³⁸⁷ Thus, Ottoman Islamic discourse was exclusionary and ethnocentric. Embracing a full-fledged cultural Turkishness was a step in the right direction

³⁸² Ibid., 769.

³⁸³ Deringil, “They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery,” 328.

³⁸⁴ Karpas, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*: 176.

³⁸⁵ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 47.

³⁸⁶ See, “BBA YEE 14/292/126/8 Memorandum by the Governor of Hicaz and Yemen, Osman Nuri Paşa. Copy compiled by his secretary after his death. The report is dated 5 Temmuz 1301/18 July 1885.” Quoted in Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” 328.

³⁸⁷ Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” 769.

because this was the only equalizing possibility for non-Turks.³⁸⁸ Traces of this cultural definition of Turkishness are visible in Republican discourse as well, where Turkishness is defined as a type of cultural gestation or as a process of becoming. However, in the Republican definition of Turkishness, Islam is less visible (yet, still present and regulated).

Ottoman officials' increasing emphasis on the central role of the Turks in the protecting Islam and the state and reveals their utilitarian view of Islam. They saw the instrumentality of Islam: a) in the state's civilizing practices that pitted "our" Islam vs. "theirs,"³⁸⁹ b) in the state's call for general Islamic unity in the face of European aggression, since these calls were predicated on the supposed Islamic unity of the empire and on a shared understanding of Islam by all Muslims, whereby Islam was an equalizing element. However, these calls for Islamic unity were paradoxical, because the Ottoman elites' civilizing mission was based on the invalidity of all other existing interpretations of Islam. That the Ottoman state advocated a universal Muslim unity only when it corresponded to its own interest highlights the instrumental use of Islam. c) The Ottoman state also utilized Islam as a legitimizing tool; the others' Islam was only affirmed when it could entrench the subordinated status of the periphery in the absence of the state's military might.³⁹⁰ In other words, it was invoked only when it functioned as "a hegemonic totalization."³⁹¹ These explicit contradictions in the state's Islamic discourse seem to be one of major the causes for the emergence of peripheral Islamic nationalist discourse.

This instrumental use of Islam is further apparent when we note that Ottoman policy

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ See: Selim Deringil, *The Well-protected Domains : Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998). And ———, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate."; Also, Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism."

³⁹⁰ Cf. Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," 341-42.

³⁹¹ I am borrowing from Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason*(London ; New York: Verso, 2007), 71.

privileged Turkish over Arabic, which has historically been an integral part of Islamic culture. Emphasizing the uniqueness of Turkish Islam required decoupling Islam from Arabic, and a new interpretation of the religion more in tune with the rise of nationalistic tendencies. As philology gained greater currency in Ottoman circles, language, progress, and ethnicity were increasingly tied together and affected the elite's reinterpretation of Islam along with their views of others. An 1885 debate over the connection between the Arabic language and Islam strongly exemplifies these new developments.

In 1885, an Arab journalist named Nacib Nader wrote, “in my opinion, in Arabic unlike European languages (*elsiney-i ifrenciye*), which look like children's toys, we can express any ideas in the most eloquent manner.”³⁹² He added that “up to this day, the Turkish language has yet to have a grammar that it deserves (*layikine*). Therefore, the truth is, without knowing proper Arabic, writing good Turkish is almost impossible.”³⁹³ These assertions outraged some of the most prominent Ottoman intellectuals. People like the renowned Ottoman lexiconist, Shams al-Din Sami, mocked Nader publicly, calling him “a vagrant Maronite from Lebanon.” Sami wrote that he understood neither Nader's intent nor his point in making those remarks. He added: “may God turn me (not into an Arab) [but worse,] into a black Arab”³⁹⁴ (*bendeniz bundan bir şey*

³⁹² *Saadet*. (No: 280, January 1, 1885).

³⁹³ *Ibid*.

³⁹⁴ *Erâb*, according to Sami's own Turkish dictionary (*Kamûs-ı Türki*), is “a black Arab, [the term is] used for those [blacks] who have come to our country from Arab lands. Such an appellation became necessary to distinguish them from the *real Arabs*; [from the] ‘*white Arabs*’.” Shams al-Din Sami, *Kamûs-ı Türki* (Istanbul: Ikdam, 1900), 932. (Emphases added). One should not assume that Arabs were unaware of such stereotypes as Al-Kawakibi, who was an ardent proponent of Arab separation and retaking the *khilafa* from the Turks, provides a long list of disparaging Turkish expressions about Arabs. In *Um al-Qura*, a book he wrote in 1898, al-Kawakibi states that “there exist many common Turkish expressions about Arabs to which one cannot ascribe any meaning except as signs of strong Turkish hatred for Arabs.” He goes to enumerate those stereotypes and stating the Turks call: the Arab of Hijaz begging Arabs (*Arap dilencisi*), Egyptians blind farmers (*kör fellah*), or ‘gypsy’ Arabs (*Arap çingenesi*), or Coptic ‘gypsy’ Arabs (*kıpti Arap*), Syrians Arabs “no to the Shami's sugar and no Arab face.” (*ne şamın şekeri ne arabın yüzü*).” Also many other derogatory terms such as: “Dirty Arab (*pîs Arab*), Arab-mentality (*Arab akli*), Arab nature (*Arap tabietü*), Arab nonsense (*Arap çikkesi*), may God turn me into an Arab if I do that (*bunu yaparsam Arap*

anladımse ‘arab değil’ erâb olayım),³⁹⁵ if I have understood any of this and pretend that I have not.”³⁹⁶ Sami also objected that no Ottoman, by which he meant no Turk, could agree with Nader Efendi’s assertions about the Ottoman language. For Sami, unlike Arabic, the real Ottoman language was neither concealed in books, nor had it degenerated. Furthermore, no one needed Arabic to write in proper Turkish since the two are from completely different language families: one is Semitic and the other is “Turani.”³⁹⁷ These polemical writings continued for about a fortnight until the palace ordered an end to the discussion over “Arabic language and Arabic sciences, since [it] could confuse people’s minds.”³⁹⁸ The debate, however, lasted long enough to reveal the Ottoman elite’s view of Arabic and its connection to religion, progress, and the sciences.

In his initial reaction to Nader, Sami compared Arabic to European languages like English, French and German and claimed that these three languages were perfect as they constituted the pillars of modern civilization, sciences, and technology.³⁹⁹ Sami’s claim regarding the connection between language and civilization illustrates the influence of the philological discourse of the period that held that there was a direct corollary between people’s progress and the language they used.⁴⁰⁰ In some instances, his remarks much resemble Renan’s famous line about Semitic and Aryan languages, especially when he notes that Arabic is a great language for

olayım), What does an Arab have to do with a music stool (*Arap nerede tanbure nereda*)?” See. al-Kawakibi, *Um Al-Qura*, 150-51.

³⁹⁵ This expression is still in use in Turkey. However, for most people it no longer connotes a black Arab.

³⁹⁶ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 2236, January 5, 1885).

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁹⁸ BOA: Dosya No: 971 Gömlek No: 76684 Fon Kod: İ..DH.. Tarih: 11/Ra/1303 Hicrî) [18.12.1885]

³⁹⁹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 2236, January 5, 1885).

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise : Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

expressing poetic imagination (*hiyalat-i şairane*), but when it comes to its application to technology and science, Arabic is not even “comparable to third rate European languages like Russian.”⁴⁰¹ Here, Sami is almost copying Orientalists such as Renan who believed that “the sensual nature of the Semitic tongues is well suited to the singularly affective character of Semitic poetry.”⁴⁰² Despite this unique poetic capability, however, Renan claimed that Semitic languages were inept at articulating “abstract terms and concepts born of rational effort.”⁴⁰³ Sami’s critics had defended Arabic as a language that was uniquely developed due to its great grammatical features, like numerous dual and plural pronouns and conjugation not present in many other languages. However, Sami disagreed with this interpretation, contending that though the languages of some “savage peoples in Africa” have the same features, this does not mean that their languages are well-developed.⁴⁰⁴

Sami had recently written a linguistic book based on “a science that is called ‘linguistic’, in the civilized world ... For the first time, I presented this humble work in our own language by consulting all the available literature, in different languages on this specific science.”⁴⁰⁵ It is clear that philological studies were popular in Ottoman intellectual circles and even outlandish speculations made by philologists as part of their construct of an Aryan-Semitic myth seem to have been taken seriously by Ottoman intellectuals. The philological discussions over Adam’s language in the Garden of Eden, is one such example. In questioning the sacredness of Arabic, Ahmet Midhet, one of the most prolific Ottoman intellectuals, refers to a book revealed to Adam

⁴⁰¹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 2236, January 5, 1885).

⁴⁰² Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 64.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 2241, January 11, 1885).

⁴⁰⁵ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 2241, January 11, 1885).

in Eden, supposedly in Sanskrit.⁴⁰⁶

It should be noted that these discussions also attest to the fact that not every Ottoman subject was considered Ottoman. With regards to the Asian territories of the Empire, philology's racial and linguistic classifications of "Semitic" people deepened the existing chasm between the center and the periphery. This can be inferred from the utterly scornful responses of Ottoman intellectuals to the Arab journalist, Nacib Nader, when he criticizes them for preferring French terms over the existing Arabic equivalents in Ottoman textbooks.⁴⁰⁷ Midhat expressed his outrage over Nader's criticism by using some common stereotypes about Arabs and wrote that

we advise him to go and teach [his nonsense] in Palestine, in Morocco or in whatever hellish place (*cehennem*) he could teach it. *The Ottomans* do not really need this... In the age of modernity and progress they [the likes of Nader] cannot convince us to incorporate their nonsense in the Ottoman educational system... If they are intent to serve, *we will help them*, otherwise it is up to them whether they want to spend their times in *taverns or Arabia*, they should just go and get lost; *amidst serving our nation, we have no time for their gibberish (turrahat)*.⁴⁰⁸ (Emphases added)

Like most literature in this period, this debate also illustrates that the Ottoman elite was not contemptuous of the Turks or the Turkish language. On the contrary, they took great pride in their Turkishness and in reforming Turkish, what Midhat terms as "serving our nation." Some like Midhat went so far as to say that "we are basically the zealots⁴⁰⁹ of the Ottoman⁴¹⁰ language."⁴¹¹ This was Midhat's reply when a young poet accused him of failing to exhibit his

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid. (No: 2240, January 10, 1885).

⁴⁰⁷ I was unable to locate Nader's own writing on language reform. What has been recounted here is entirely based on Ahmet Midhat's account. See, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, (No: 2238, January 8, 1885).

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ *Biz asasan osmanli gayretkeşi.*

⁴¹⁰ In my English redaction of the related documents, I follow the original as to whether call the Ottoman state's language Ottoman or Turkish.

⁴¹¹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, (No: 2240, January 10, 1885).

usual forcefulness to emphasize that Turkish was on par with French in its development.⁴¹²

The most revealing aspect of this debate, however, is the way in which it symbolizes the Ottoman elite's dilemma regarding the ties between Islam and Arabic culture and language. It is hard to determine how much their views had been affected by philological studies; however, philology introduced newer ideas about the connection of race, language and progress, which figured prominently in Ottoman elite's nationalist thought, especially in the last quarter of the 19th century. While Muslims consider Arabic the medium of revelation, it gradually came to be known as the language of the "Semitic people," which philologists claimed was stuck in an infantile stage of development. On the one hand, as Muslims, the Ottoman elite, like Sami and Midhat, had to acknowledge the absolute truth of the revelation through Arabic, and on the other, philologists like Renan designated Arabic as a 'Semitic language,' "incapable of articulating abstract terms."⁴¹³ The elite's ready embracement of these pseudo-scientific views of Arabic as deficient and backward increasingly made it tempting to decouple Arabic from Islam. The following passage from Ahmet Midhat vividly shows such an attempt to distance Islam from Arabs and Arabic, when he declares:

They say Arabic language is sacred, why is that? Because, [we are told that] the holy Qur'an...is in Arabic. Great! Does this mean only the ignorant are Muslims? We are all Muslims. With our service, we have already proven that we own a greater Islamic zeal than they do ... Is the language of the Qur'an the same as the gibberish of Arabic (*acwakli fulanly*) spoken by Najib Nader? This is just impossible; because since the time they set foot on the earth, to the day on which the Qur'an was revealed, and now thirteen hundred years to that day, the Arabs have yet to be able to imitate or to produce a single verse as eloquent as, and as supreme linguistically (*i'cazi fashat*) as the Quran. This means that the Qur'an is not the word of Arabs; it is not Arabic; it is *Allahce*⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 64.

⁴¹⁴ *Allhace* (*Allah+ce*) is a made up word by Midhat. When the suffix "*ce*" (in Turkish language) used in reference to a language it functions like *ish* in English.

(the language of God).⁴¹⁵

To resolve the incompatibility of the Qur'an with "the science of philology," and to relegate Arabic to a secondary role to Turkish, Midhat dissociates the Qur'an from a "primitive Semitic" language. Apparently, for Midhat, the commonly held Muslim view about the miraculous inimitability of the Qur'an (*i'jaz*) was not reconcilable with its revelation through a "Semitic language."

Unlike Midhat, Sami refrained from questioning 'the sacredness of Arabic language.' Perhaps hoping not to offend conservative groups or to throw his new philological findings about Arabic into question, Sami tried to find a middle ground. He even went so far as to state that all Islamic languages are sacred and Arabic is the most sacred of all.⁴¹⁶ By way of giving examples, Sami strove to show that the weaknesses of Arabic were real but they had no bearing on the sacredness of language. For instance, stated Sami, an architect builds a mediocre mosque and a house that is spectacular in every sense.⁴¹⁷ The mosque's structure is in no way comparable to that majestic house, but despite the mosque's great architectural deficiencies, it is holy and the house is not. In this way Sami hoped to assure his audience that when he talked about the deficiencies of Arabic, he had only its scientific flaws (*fununce nuksani*) in mind. He also challenged his opponents and contended that if they possess any knowledge of this 'new science,' they should make their arguments accordingly.⁴¹⁸ Of course, Sami's respect for Arabic could not be extended to Arabs or even to contemporary Arabic—the first were viewed as "primitives" and the second as "degenerated." To Sami, for the past several centuries, the overall

⁴¹⁵ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 2240, January 10, 1885).

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.* (No: 2241, January 11, 1885).

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Arab contribution to Islam had been negative. Addressing the Arabs, he noted that

for the last seven to eight centuries, those who have tried to protect Islam for the cause of Allah were not Arabs, but Turks and other nations who joined the Turks in that cause, whom are not well known to be adored by you. In this entire time, the Arabs have not done anything but to prove and unveil their primitive ignorance and to label Turkish *mujahids*...as Christians.⁴¹⁹

Now, it becomes clearer that the insertion of the language clause in the final draft of the 1876 Constitution under the aegis of Abdülhamid II was not a mere accident. The language clause was part of the most significant text in Ottoman history that illustrated the ruling elite's thoughts, views, and philosophy for 'the reordering or reassertion of things' in late Ottoman society. The Constitution was a text, and as van Dijk maintains, a text has to have a context or a discourse,⁴²⁰ which in this case gave a centrality to the Turkish language. In modern times, language, any language, is more a political phenomenon than a cultural one, and therefore modern states' policies and attitudes regarding language must not be perceived as being apolitical.⁴²¹ Declaring a particular language as the official one in a multilingual context signifies the change in this context, or as James Scott and Eugen Weber have suggested, unveils the domestic colonization of the other.⁴²²

No Ottoman Sultan besides Abdülhamid II had ever been so attentive to giving a religious outlook to his politics. While Arabic, unlike Turkish, was traditionally supposed to be the

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Teun van Dijk, "Social Cognition and Discourse," in *Handbook of Language and Social Psychology* ed. Howard Giles and W. P. Robinson (Chichester England ; New York: Wiley, 1990), 164.

⁴²¹ Cf. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*. Also, Abbas Vali, *Kurds and State in Iran : The Making of Kurdish Identity*, International Library of Iranian Studies (London; New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed in the U.S. and Canada by Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁴²² James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale Agrarian Studies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 72. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976), 156.

language of religious instruction, it received no official attention under the Sultan's rule.⁴²³ This very attempt in and of itself was an official declaration of the secondary role assigned to all languages and their speakers. Through such a linguistic hierarchization, "[t]he organization of power... telling us who is included and who is left out, it also differentiates the bounded political community internally. This it does by acknowledging different kinds of identities in law."⁴²⁴ Considering the historical context of his accession to power and his ostentatious claim to religiosity, Abdülhamid's action was overtly unorthodox. Why the ruling ethnic groups' language was declared official when the state was adamant about radically reasserting its religious identity? Is this paradoxical?

The language issue clearly represents another aspect of 'the double status' of Turkish and, in a sense, another area of contestation between the dominant and the dominated. Unlike dominated groups, the Ottoman officials, however, did not view it as a paradox. As indicated above, they had already particularized Islam, the universalist aspect of the Empire, in their hierarchal (re)interpretation. This interpretation itself represented the merger of Ottoman-Turkish Islam with their official nationalism. Also, it was a step further in the recognition of their own ethnicity as the "foundational element" of the Empire. The Ottoman linguistic hierarchy, which the new constitutional stipulation introduced into a multilingual and multiethnic context, reveals the new aspects of "us" versus "them." Therefore, from the perspective of Ottoman officials, granting Turkish a unique status was not a contradiction, but rather a reinforcement of their already hyphenated identity: Turkish-Islamic identity. Both Islam and the Turkish language were

⁴²³ The first draft by Midhat Paşa lacked any stipulation regarding the official language. Yet, in its final draft, it was stipulated that the official language of the empire was Turkish. For the full text of the 1876 Constitution see, "Salname-i Devlet," (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Ahmet İhsan ve Şurekası,, 1322 (1904)).

⁴²⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 22. It should be indicated that Mamdani's focus is on political identity rather than ethnicity and language.

domains of negotiating the differences between the dominant and the dominated. The uniqueness of Turkish Islam, understood as the unique role of Ottoman elites⁴²⁵ and their capability in serving Islam,⁴²⁶ overlaps with the Ottoman definition of *Khilafa* as well.⁴²⁷ Others were seen as lacking these qualities and therefore learning Turkish would have provided the right tools for them to remain both Muslim and Ottoman. Hence, both Islam and Turkish constituted the main conditions of difference and inequality and became manifestations of positions of power. As in their study of Habsburg multilingualism Schjerve and Vetter tell us, “investigating these inequalities means that we approach a closer understanding of how the respective languages and their speakers negotiate their different power positions and, ultimately, what kind of conflicts these negotiations were to bring about at a specific historical time.”⁴²⁸

It should be stated that in the same period, the Russian and Hapsburg Empires too were grappling with competing nationalisms and were forced to deal with and to produce specific national language policies. These changes in various multilingual settings were to take place within a specific discourse of official nationalism. Therefore, “We must ... bear in mind that diglossic relations are constituted through discourse, since discourse provides for the ideological

⁴²⁵ Zürcher points out that at the end of the 1860s, with the publication of *Mecelle* by Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, the Ottoman elite’s Islam began to diverge from other interpretations. According to Zürcher, the Ottoman elite were “[i]nspired by positivism, they were vehemently anti-clerical, but with the possible exception of Abdullah Cevdet, the ‘atheist philosopher’ (*dinsiz mutefekkir*) every one of them saw in a ‘true’ or ‘purified’ Islam, a ‘rational’ religion, which was open to science, a valuable building block of Ottoman reconstruction and a social cement.” Zürcher, “The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State,” 60.

⁴²⁶ See: Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism.”

⁴²⁷ As stated above, the Ottoman rule defended that the establishment of order per se was considered as a service to Islam regardless of how the caliph ruled.

⁴²⁸ Rosita Rindler Schjerve and Eva Vetter, “Historical Sociolinguistics and Multilingualism: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in the Development of a Multifunctional Framework,” in *Diglossia and Power Language Policies and Practice in the 19th Century Habsburg Empire* ed. Monica Heller Richard J. Watts (Berlin ; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 39.

basis upon which diglossic is produced, maintained and eventually changed.”⁴²⁹

As indicated earlier, both Deringil and Makdisi argue that Ottoman colonialism or Orientalism was some type of adaptation of the enemy i.e., the West’s strategy in restructuring its periphery. The Ottomans were not acting much differently in their adaptation of linguistic strategies either, as shown by one of Abdülhamid’s decrees in 1894.⁴³⁰ When their Turkification policies regarding language are compared with that of the other empires, such as the Russian and Hapsburg empires, the Ottomans appear quite up to date in their official nationalism. The Hapsburgs were actually much more accommodating and unlike that of the Ottomans, the Hapsburg “constitution of 1867 decreed that every ethnic group should have the right of maintaining and protecting its nationality and language.”⁴³¹ The language policy reflected in the first Ottoman constitution was more like that of the Russian state’s language policies during “the Reign of Alexander II (1881-94) [in which] Russification [became] official dynastic policy: Long after...other nationalisms had appeared in the Empire.”⁴³² It seems there was a general and an evolutionary trend that showed greater state emphasis on language corresponding to the gradual invigoration of official nationalism.

In the Ottoman context, this greater emphasis on Turkish was followed by certain practical limitations and excessive sensitivity to the linguistic demands and activities of dominated groups. In 1907 Said Nursi, a renowned Kurdish scholar, requested the inclusion of the Kurdish language in the education system. As a result he was transferred to a mental hospital,

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 38.

⁴³⁰ BOA : Dosya No 1312/1, Gümlek No: 27, Fon Kodu: M/101, i. HUS. [07.26. 1894]. This letter is attended to in some length in the next section below.

⁴³¹ Susanne Czeitschner, "Discourse, Hegemony and Polyglossia in the Judicial System of Trieste in the 19th Century," in *Diglossia and Power Language Policies and Practice in the 19th Century Habsburg Empire*, ed. Monica Heller and Richard J. Watts (Berlin ; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003).

⁴³² Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*: 87.

which marked the culmination of a trend that illustrates the Ottoman state's reaction to the non-Turkish Other's ethnic and linguistic demands. Attending to this event in his book on Nursi, Şerif Mardin explains Abdülhamid II's reaction as his extra sensitivity to the state's unity, thus ignoring the ethnic aspect of Nursi's demand.⁴³³ Mardin is right in pointing to Abdülhamid's sensitivity. However, he overlooks language as one of the battlegrounds of nationalism and therefore relates the event mostly to Abdülhamid's personal paranoia.⁴³⁴ Abdülhamid famously "ordered *huzur dersleri* (lessons in 'royal' audience), where young scholars could challenge the established *ulema*, to be given in Turkish rather than in Arabic, as it had long been the tradition."⁴³⁵

The weight that a modern state ascribes to a particular language in a multilingual socio-political context unveils the nature of the ethnic and linguistic power relations. Therefore, it should not be isolated from the overall nationalist tendencies of the ruling nations. The issue of language and its connection to the integrity of the nation-state or its creation has been a matter of great importance for nationalist groups. In both the 19th and 20th century, nationalists, dominant and otherwise, have taken this issue of language and its connection with political power very seriously. Nationalistic tendencies, in multilingual social contexts are much concerned with "the diglossic distribution," to borrow Schjerve and Vetter's phraseology. Therefore, "language domain behaviors"⁴³⁶ are fertile grounds for detecting nationalistic tendencies.

It the era of nationalism, the fear of a polity with a diverse linguistic make up has always

⁴³³ See, Chapter 7.

⁴³⁴ See Serif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey :The case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, SUNY series in Near Eastern studies (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), 75-80.

⁴³⁵ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 67-68. (Emphasis added)

⁴³⁶ Schjerve and Vetter, "Historical Sociolinguistics and Multilingualism: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in the Development of a Multifunctional Framework," 35-69.

been present. In Conner's terms, it is seen as a factor that in the event of crises could easily turn a country into pieces.⁴³⁷ In the modern era, "[t]his way of thinking is not new. In the eighteenth century, Herder and Fichte were declaring that the basis of a nation, and its genius, lay in its language."⁴³⁸ As shown below, Ottoman state documents reveal that Ottoman elite generally considered language as "the basis of the nation."

The issue of official language is central to the project of modern nation-state building and nationalism. Charles Taylor, elaborating on Gellner's insight, points to the importance of the issue of official language and linguistic demands in modern nationalist rivalries. He states:

What Gellner has done, which is very valuable, is define some of the very important stakes of a nationalist struggle. Just because the modern state does sustain an official language/culture, it becomes of ultimate significant to those with a strong national identity to get some kind of control of the state.⁴³⁹

Yet, despite its significance, Hamidian linguistic nationalism has rarely been attended to, some aspects of that period's "obsessive linguistic talks" have been the focus of a few important works by the historians of the late Ottoman Empire.⁴⁴⁰ The fights and wrangling over languages, official and otherwise, in the modern era, are directly connected with the fight over controlling the state and therefore it is a nationalist fight.

The linguistic and ethnic policies of the Hamidian regime seem to be among the least studied subjects partly because of this regime's insistence on its religious character. This is in addition to the later Kemalist depiction of it 'as the wholly religious other.' As shown below, the Hamidian regime had a systematic project of linguistic Turkification, which their contemporary

⁴³⁷ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*: 14.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," 223.

⁴⁴⁰ See, David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876-1908*(London ; Totowa, N.J.: Cass, 1977).

non-Turkish Muslims were well aware of.

The emphasis on language and its political nature in the Hamidian era should be seen in the context of nationalism. The late 19th century language debates illustrate the fact that the Empire's different groups were becoming increasingly aware of the connection between the role of language and political power as they embraced nationalist views. Renowned Muslim revivalist Rashid Rida's views best represent the language and ethnic politics of the era within a religious framework. Rida's views are a paramount example of the interconnectivity of religion and nationalism, and the respective role of language in the late Ottoman context.

In the late 1880s, as the Hamidian regime pushed for stricter Turkification policies in the realms of education and state-bureaucracy, Arab revivalists like Rida were also advocating for Arabic to be recognized as the empire's official language. Such efforts at first glimpse might seem to be rooted only in the likes of Rida's religious concerns and sensitivities. However, the subtext of his writings continually shows that his concerns go beyond pure religiosity and reflect the ongoing battle of the time.⁴⁴¹ They show that the politics of language of that time could not be easily separated from its racial and nationalistic politics. As Haddad has shown, Rida was well aware of the nationalistic and political implications of diverse languages for the state when advocating that Arabic be granted the status of the sole official language in the Empire:

The society should...strive to unify the language of religion and of the state by making Arabic the official language of the Ottoman state. Rida held that such unification would result in both secular⁴⁴² and religious benefits. It would spread the language of religion and abolish the racial differences between the Arabs and the Turks. For Rida, at that point, language was the criterion of race, and competing languages would breed

⁴⁴¹ For a great account of Rida's views see, Haddad, " Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashīd Riḍā's Ideas on the Caliphate ".

⁴⁴² I did not have a chance to consult the original Arabic source. However, I believe the word "secular" is not a precise translation of terms such as *ad-dunya*, *al-ma'ash*, *al-Haya*,... To people like Rida, religion was so comprehensive, such that even strictly economic or political activities of Muslims were to take place in the confines of the religion and, as such, they were themselves religious activities.

conflicts between the races of the Ottoman Empire in the same way they bred conflicts in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁴⁴³

It is important to remember that at the turn of the 20th century, some Kurdish activists also used language as the main platform to further their national cause. As an Ottoman Kurdish intellectual, Bâbân posited, “the basis of the liberation of a nation is not national liberation but education. The key to education is language. The gate to civilization will be opened by this key.”⁴⁴⁴ Persian and Turkish reformists, who were striving for the creation of a strong nation respectively, deemed language as one of the most important building blocks of the nation. It is not surprising that from the second half of the 19th century onwards, they advocated purifying their respective languages as a way of eliminating their Others in their linguistic space. They thought that a simple, publicly accessible language, along with a modernized education system could provide sufficient tools for their nations to enter the gate of ‘Civilization’ and to survive in the face of European colonialism. It was in this context that Mirza Aqa Khan-e Kirmani (1854 - 1896/97), who spend the later years his of life in Istanbul, stated that the “nation is a polity (*Umma*), which speaks a single language” and its “strength (*qavam*) is founded in its language.”⁴⁴⁵ Hence, it was not an accident that “Sultan Abdülhamid II...was also for increasing administrative efficiency through *the use of a single language*.”⁴⁴⁶

Language was becoming one of the important battlegrounds of nationalism, and modern linguistic policies generally reflected this dialectical relationship between opposing

⁴⁴³ Haddad, "Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashîd Riḍā's Ideas on the Caliphate," 255.

⁴⁴⁴ Martin Strohmeier, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity: Heroes and Patriots, Traitors and Foes*, Social, Economic, and Political studies of the Middle East and Asia, (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2003), 40.

⁴⁴⁵ Faridun Adamiyat, *Andishahha-Yi Mirza Aqa Khan-E Kirmani*, Chap-i 1. ed., Zaban Va Farhang-I Iran (Tehran: Kitabkhanah-i Tuhuri, 1967), 258.

⁴⁴⁶ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 67-68. (Emphasis added).

nationalisms—of the dominant and dominated ethnic groups. Dominant nationalism usually takes its right to sovereignty for granted, while from a dominated ethnic group's standpoint this assumption could be the loci of the dominant Other's hegemony. Again, the domain of language becomes the battleground for different ethnic groups to engage in "claiming [or reclaiming] one's nation" to use Janet Klein's phrase.⁴⁴⁷

It is against the background of linguistic nationalism in the Ottoman context that by the end of the 19th century some Kurdish intellectuals decided to publish an Ottoman-Kurdish paper called *Kurdistan*.⁴⁴⁸ It was an attempt on the part of those intellectuals to revive and modernize Kurdish language, while Ottoman officials regarded this journal as the "accursed Kurdish (*Kürtçe mel'ûne*)."⁴⁴⁹ By the last quarter of the 19th century, the overall emphasis on one's language and place in connection to one's ethnicity increasingly became an issue for communal rivalries.⁴⁵⁰ As Ottoman state documents demonstrate, rewards given to one's own language, on the part of the dominated groups, could signify the fading of their sense of belonging to the dominant language and the official nationalism.⁴⁵¹ The Ottoman state's severe reactions to the linguistic activities of the dominated ethnic groups are also a testimony to the then growing

⁴⁴⁷ Janet Klein, "Claiming the Nation: The Origins and the Nature of Kurdish Nationalist Discourse" (Unpublished MA thesis, Princeton University, 1996).

⁴⁴⁸ For the analysis of Kurdish papers see; ibid. Martin Strohmeier, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity: Heroes and Patriots, Traitors and Foes*, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia, (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2003); Mehmed Emin Bozarslan, ed. *Kurdistan: Rojname Kurdi Ya Pêşin / the First Kurdish Newspaper* (Uppsala: Deng, 1991). It should be noted that before making its way into the Kurdistan region, the First Office of the Chamberlin (*Baş Kitabete Dairesi*) banned the paper in 1899. BOA: İ.MTZ. (05): Dosya No. 30, Gömlek No. 1685, 1315. Z. 8 [1899]; quoted in Metin Yuksel, "Dengbej, Mullah, Intelligentsia: The Survival and Revival of the Kurdish-Kurmanji Language in the Middle East, 1925--1960. Unpublished Dissertation " (The University of Chicago 2011).

⁴⁴⁹ BOA: Tarih: 27/Z /1318 [1901]. Dosya No: 2473, Gömlek No:105, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT.

⁴⁵⁰ In 1881, the Ottoman state bans the use of names such as Kurdistan and Armenistan and claims, 'to prevent ethnic conflicts between the Kurds and Armenians in Bitlis.' See, BOA : Dosya No:121, Gömlek No:7231, Fon Kodu: İ.ŞD. Tarih: 20/L /1298 (Hicri)[1881].

⁴⁵¹ For instance, in the following document it is clearly stated that education in Armenian and Greek is a threat to the Empire's territorial unity: BOA : Dosya No: 279, Gömlek No: 18; Fon Kodu: MF. MKT. Tarih: [6/10/1895].

linguistic nationalism. The Hamidian state went so far as to collect⁴⁵² traditional Kurdish religious books such as elegiac poetry that praised the Prophet of Islam (*naat*) or the Albanian alphabetic book (*Elifba*), which had previously been granted a permit.⁴⁵³

2. History of Educational and Linguistic Turkification

Why has the phenomenon of linguistic nationalism in the late Ottoman period been generally overlooked? As indicated above, Kemalist and orientalist depictions of late Ottoman state and society as the universe of the *homo religiosus* should not be overlooked. Even in the face of indisputable evidence of linguistic discrimination, the Kemalists persist in denying that the Hamidian state was biased in favor of Turkish. For instance, they claimed Kurdish was forbidden as a language of instruction⁴⁵⁴ not because of the preferential status accorded to Turkish, but because Kurdish was an “unsophisticated language.”⁴⁵⁵

There is important body of scholarship, which does not question arbitrary beginning for the emergence of Turkish nationalism. For instance, Hasan Kayalı states that “the main proposition of [his] study is that among the chief Muslim groups of the Ottoman Empire political

⁴⁵² BOA : Dosya no. 1097, Gömlek: 41, 27/Ha/1322 [1908]. In 1887, a certain Ahmed Süreyya Bey attempts to publish a Kurdish-Turkish paper by the same name: Kurdistan. However, it seems he gets in trouble with the Hamidian regime’s press regulation (*Matbuat Nizamnamesi*) and his attempts to publish the paper were unsuccessful. BOA : Tarih: 14/L /1326/ 1904 [1887] (Hicrî), Dosya No: 2651, Gömlek No: 48, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. I also came across a document referring to another paper called *İmdada*. The document states that in 1900 this paper incited Kurdish people to rise against the state. However, it does not provide any information with respect to the paper’s language, its publisher or its place of publication. Cf. BOA : Tarih: 05/Ca/1318/ 1900 (Hicrî) Dosya No:36 Gömlek No:48 Fon Kodu: Y:PRK.EŞA.

⁴⁵³ The document evidences this fact see, BOA: Dosya no. 591, Gömlek: 86, 09/Te/1322 [1906]; also quoted in Yuksel, "Dengbej, Mullah, Intelligentsia: The Survival and Revival of the Kurdish-Kurmanji Language in the Middle East, 1925--1960. Unpublished Dissertation " 268.

⁴⁵⁴ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 48.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

nationalism was not a viable force until the end of World War I.”⁴⁵⁶ Yet, others scholars claim that the major display of Turkish nationalism was: “In the second annual convention [of the CUP], which met in Salonica in November 1910, it decided that the Turkish language be employed in all schools throughout the Empire, aiming at denationalization of all non-Turkish communities and instilling of patriotism among the Turks.”⁴⁵⁷ Nevertheless, as shown below, such a policy had already been rigorously implemented in the late 19th century.

Another reason might be the slower pace of Turkification policies in the Ottoman Empire compared with that of the Republic. The enormous population of the empire, most of whom were unable to communicate in Turkish, was a major obstacle to the Ottoman state’s project to universalize its language. Therefore, one must not try to understand the Turkification of the Ottoman language by comparing it to that of the Republican project. The Kemalist state dealt with a more manageable population in which Turks constituted the majority. The enormous population and the vast geographical territories are mainly to blame for rendering the Empire’s linguistic policies less visible. More than anything, these realities should point to the fact that the Hamidian regime could not act identically everywhere all the time. Although the Hamidian state’s official nationalism could be considered a major component of its survival strategy or a paradigmatic requirement, the state would have had to compromise it in the face of more urgent and pressing necessities. Therefore, many of the state’s documents, directives and regulations had to be translated into non-Turkish languages before regional policies could be put into practice. However, even in such circumstances, the use of non-Turkish languages has always been referred to as an exception and a temporary measure. The code for making such exceptions

⁴⁵⁶ Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks : Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 13.

⁴⁵⁷ Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation*(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 48.

is the phrase “because this region’s people do not know Turkish.”⁴⁵⁸ This was the case from, at least the early 1880s onward in all Ottoman regions from Libya to Kurdistan.⁴⁵⁹

Archival documents such as those referenced above support al-Husri’s⁴⁶⁰ contention that there existed a gradual Turkification of language from the *Tanzimat* period onward. Clearly, in this period a traceable trajectory and a steady growth of language nationalism are observable. It should be noted that the Hamidian regime’s censorship policies were notorious and could lead to misinterpretations of the intentions behind the state practices.

There could be instances that make it difficult for one to say whether it is nationalism, paranoia, or both, that can best explain the state’s restrictive policies with respect to non-Turkish languages. The rapid increase in the censorship policy of the Hamidian state in comparison with its predecessors might tempt one to dismiss the state’s behaviors in the linguistic domain. However, the richness of Ottoman archival documents makes such a dismissal impossible. They clearly show how the state recognized the ruling group’s language with a unique status and restricted other languages. As mentioned above, these behaviors in the language domain are sometimes confusing. However, by the end of the 19th century the language of archival documents becomes clear enough and does not leave much room for misinterpretation.

It is common to interpret Abdülhamid’s language policies in the light of his regime’s security concerns, as we saw earlier in Şerif Mardin’s take on the Hamidian Palace’s reaction to

⁴⁵⁸ *Ahalisinin Türkçe'ye Vakıf Olamamalarından Dolayı*.

⁴⁵⁹ BOA: Dosya No:1343, Gömlek No:68, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT, Tarih: 29/Ra/1301 (Hicrî) [27.01.1884]. This document states that “the people in Tripoli have made a request for the translation of the laws and directives into Arabic since they do not speak Turkish... hereby this letter is sent for consultation on the matter (*Valinin icraatlarından memnuniyetlerini belirterek Türkçe bilmedikleri için kanun ve nizamnamelerin Arapça tercümelerini isteyen Trablusgarb ahalisinin mahzarının, ... görüş alınmak üzere gönderildiği*). BOA: Dosya No:348, Gömlek No:65, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 29/Ş /1312/ (Hicrî) [1895]; BOA: Dosya No: 2646, Gömlek No:11, Fon Kodu: ŞD. Tarih: 22/Ra/1313/ (Hicrî) [1895].

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. al-Husri, *MuhaDarat fi Nushu' al-fikrah al-Qawmiyah/ Lectures on the Idea of Nationalism*: 126-27.

Said Nursi's language reform proposal. We should bear in mind that the state, any state, has a variety of reasons for declaring one language as the official one. This very attempt is an official declaration and a legal reaffirmation of the privileged status of the ruling nation. In the age of nationalism, hardly any language receives official recognition without some ideological bases for this recognition, and therefore these types of politics cannot be innocent.

The Hamidian regime saw Turkification policies as a supplement to its security and disciplinary measures. The state was aware of the significance of its Turkification policies as an instrument of governmentality. Mere security approaches to official language cannot entirely reveal the embedded and hidden nationalistic view of "us" versus "them" in a diglossic context like that of the Ottoman Empire. Viewing such policies as security imperatives should not make us oblivious to the covert ethnic-based divisions in them.

From the mid-1880s onward, the state embarked on a dual policy of security and Turkification. Those policies concurrently aimed at the creation of a more Turkified public and the introduction of new security and disciplinary measures that could increase the state's control simply by universalizing Turkish.⁴⁶¹ In 1886 for instance, state laws had already criminalized advertisements of theatrical and other artistic activities⁴⁶² (*Tiyatro ve benzeri hususlara*) even in foreign papers unless they appeared along with their Turkish rendition.⁴⁶³ In the following year, the state banned any language other than Turkish from being used in sending telegrams, both

⁴⁶¹ For more on the universalization and particularization of German language in Hapsburg Empire see, Anderson's discussion on official nationalism in: Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

⁴⁶² I was only able to find those documents that pointed to the existence of these laws, but I found nothing regarding the first time they were introduced.

⁴⁶³ All governorates of Adana, Edirne, Manastir, Salanik, Syria, Uskudere, Yanya and so forth were warned against instances of the possible violation of this law. See: BOA: Dosya No: 1375, Gömlek No: 98, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 06/S /1304 (Hicrî) [02.11.1886].

within and outside Ottoman domains.⁴⁶⁴ Realizing the difficulties these restrictions had created for Europeans, about a decade later the state relaxed some of the communication-related restrictions. Subsequently, foreigners could use English, Italian, French and German in sending telegram messages.⁴⁶⁵ However, these provisions were not extended to non-European languages; restrictions remained in effect for Arabic, Persian or any other non-European languages.⁴⁶⁶ Another example of the application of such disciplinary measures was to be seen in prisons, like the one in Kastamonu, which housed many prisoners from different backgrounds.⁴⁶⁷ Based on these new measures, inmates could not use any language other than Turkish in their correspondence with the outside world. Their letters had to be written in Turkish so that they could “be opened and read by postal workers in the local post office.”⁴⁶⁸

The Turkification of language followed a linear trajectory in the Ottoman Empire. The inauguration of the *Tanzimat* period in the first half of the 19th century also marked the beginning of thinking of Turkish as the language of the state. From this period on, the spread of Turkish became part of the agenda of the Ottoman state. The thought behind a unified language could very well be a byproduct of the creation of the modern army, which also necessitated a singular medium of communication. Although Ottoman Administrative Records do not mention any type of language reform in the earlier periods of the 19th century, there is evidence that in 1838 attempts were made to teach soldiers Turkish in places like Erzurum, in Eastern Anatolia.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁴ BOA: Dosya No:496, Gömlek No:56, Fon Kodu: HR.TO.. Tarih: 09/6/1877.

⁴⁶⁵ BOA: Dosya No:2242, Gömlek No:44, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 27/R /1317 (Hicrî) [03.09.1899]

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ BOA: Dosya No:270, Gömlek No:25, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 07/S /1312 (Hicrî) [09.08.1894]

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ I have not yet encountered such documents in my research. However, this does not mean they do not exist.

According to archival records, efforts to spread Turkish among non-Turks took place less than a decade later.⁴⁷⁰ These records reveal that the people of Libya were perhaps among the first targets of state-led educational missions. In 1847, the Committee of Public Education (*Maarif-i Umumiye Meclisi*) attempted to establish a school in this region, in which Turkish would be the sole language of instruction.⁴⁷¹ Arabic instruction in that school was deemed to be unnecessary since the people in that region “were all Arabs and already knew Arabic.”⁴⁷² All teachers had to be sent from Istanbul. The document cites “the exceptional benefits of this measure” by referring to the fact that those people would learn “*the language of the state (devletin lisani)*.” As such, they would have access “to the unmediated diktats and notifications (*emr ve tenbih*)” by the state and its officials.⁴⁷³

How do these behaviors “reflect the ideological background of specific diglossic power manifestations?”⁴⁷⁴ Are these practices not common state practices in the modern era? They surely are, and for this very reason, unlike what orientalist such as Bernard Lewis, and Kemalist historiographers want us to believe, these practices contain a great deal of assimilatory intent on the part of the dominant group. Ottoman archival documents show that in the beginning of the second half of the 19th century, officials strove to turn the Turkish language into a means of creating a sense of loyalty to the state. Even if the 1847 education mission to Tripoli and Benghazi⁴⁷⁵ can be construed as a benevolent act to educate ‘poor African Arabs,’ teaching

⁴⁷⁰ BOA: Dosya No: 91 Gömlek No:52 Fon Kodu: A.}MKT. Tarih: 14/Ş /1263 (Hicrî) [28.07.1847]

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Schjerve and Vetter, "Historical Sociolinguistics and Multilingualism: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in the Development of a Multifunctional Framework," 39.

⁴⁷⁵ BOA : Dosya No: 91, Gömlek No: 52, Fon Kodu: A.}MKT. Tarih: 14/Ş /1263 (Hicrî) [28.07.1847].

Turkish to the Christian subjects of the empire in Paris does not look like an act of mere goodwill. In 1856, the aforementioned Committee (*Meclis-i Maarif*) decided to send a number of teachers to teach Turkish to the Christian subjects of the empire living in Paris.⁴⁷⁶ The Committee also declared its commitment to bear all the costs of this educational mission and to give financial aid to all the Christians who were residing in Paris and willing to study Turkish.⁴⁷⁷ The state's missions to teach Turkish do not seem to be limited to sporadic instances or to non-Muslims subjects living abroad. Non-Muslim communities remained one of the major targets of linguistic Turkification throughout the 19th century.⁴⁷⁸ This seems to validate the above claims by Akçuraoglu and Gökalep that the main objective of Ottomanism was the Turkification of non-Turks.

Up to the mid-1880s, the general policy of the Ottoman state focused on giving incentives and encouragement to non-Muslim religious private schools. The state reimbursed private schools for all expenses incurred by teaching Turkish.⁴⁷⁹ According to the Education Department's Regulations (*Maarif nizamnamesine göre*), even though non-Muslim private schools did not receive any governmental financial aid, Turkish instruction was regarded as an exception (*müstesna*) to this general rule.⁴⁸⁰ The Turkish language teachers in those schools received their salary directly from the Education Ministry.⁴⁸¹ It became the official policy of the

⁴⁷⁶ BOA : Dosya No: 150 Gömlek No: 69 Fon Kodu: HR.MKT. Tarih: 28/L /1272 (Hicrî) [02.07.1856]

⁴⁷⁷ (*tahsilde bulunanların masraflarının ödenmesi*). Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 150 Gömlek No: 69 Fon Kodu: HR.MKT. Tarih: 28/L /1272 (Hicrî) [02.07.1856]; and BOA : Dosya No: 79 Gömlek No: 66 Fon Kodu: A.}AMD. Tarih: 1273 (Hicrî) [1856]; Also, BOA : Dosya No: 675 Gömlek No: 61 Fon Kodu: MVL. Tarih: 24/Ca/1281 (Hicrî) [25.10.1864].

⁴⁷⁹ BOA : Dosya No: 9, Gömlek No: 97, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 11/M /1290 (Hicrî) [10.03.1873]. Also, BOA : Dosya No: 10 Gömlek No: 63 Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 06/Ra/1290 (Hicrî) [04.05.1873].

⁴⁸⁰ BOA : Dosya No: 9, Gömlek No:97, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 11/M /1290 (Hicrî) [10.03.1873]

⁴⁸¹ (*Türkçe öğreten Muallimlere Maarif Tahsisatından Maaş Verildiği*). Ibid.

state to help private religious schools with Turkish instruction. If a non-Muslim private school decided to hire a Turkish language instructor, s/he would have received her/his salary either from the Education Ministry or from the Treasury.⁴⁸² The state, as indicated earlier, followed this policy until almost the mid-1890s. However, to carry out its Turkish language instruction policies, the state introduced a tough monitoring regime by the late 1880s.

In 1888, Ottoman officials were alarmed by a report that all the guards of the foreign councils in Salonika carried arms and that the local Christian schools did not comply with the Turkish education policy.⁴⁸³ After the immediate investigation, the authorities found out that though the first piece of news was not entirely accurate, Turkish was not being taught in Salonika schools. The Education Ministry received a warning that such a violation of the state's Turkish instruction policies would hamper the universalization of Turkish language (*türkçe te'mimi*).⁴⁸⁴

In the 1890s, non-Muslim private schools faced even greater pressure to implement the state's Turkish language instruction policy. In 1894, these schools received warnings that they were legally obliged to include Turkish language in their curricula.⁴⁸⁵ The Palace issued a decree claiming that European states were imposing their own languages without hesitation, not just in their own homelands, but even in lands they temporarily occupied.⁴⁸⁶ So, as the Christian schools in Ottoman domains were actively disseminating their own languages, they had to be forced to

⁴⁸² (*Maaşlarının Maarif Bütçesi yada Hazine'den ödenmesi*): BOA : Dosya No: 10, Gömlek No: 63, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 06/Ra/1290 (Hicrî) [04.05.1873].

⁴⁸³ BOA: Dosya No: 1505, Gömlek No: 43, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 19/Ş /1305 (Hicrî) [30.04.1888].

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ *Memalik-i Şahane'de Bulunan Mekatib-i Hristiyanîye'de Dahi Suret-i Ciddiyede Türkçe Tedris Ettirilmesi*. BOA : Dosya No: 443 Gömlek No: 33208, Fon Kodu: BEO, Tarih: 24/M /1312 (Hicrî) [27.07.1894].

⁴⁸⁶ BOA: Dosya No 1312/1, Gömlek No: 27, Fon Kodu: M/101, i. HUS. [07.26. 1894].

teach the Turkish language.⁴⁸⁷ The Education Ministry was to plant an informant (*muhbir*) in the schools to observe student progress in learning the Ottoman language.⁴⁸⁸ This Ministry was also to appoint an inspector to closely mentor and examine the Turkish language proficiency of the students.⁴⁸⁹ If any school faltered in its compliance with these measures, it would face closure.⁴⁹⁰ These new measures resulted in a scandal when the American embassy sent a protest letter to the Ottoman Foreign ministry. The letter was written by a schoolteacher in Beirut and harshly criticized the newly introduced language instruction policies.⁴⁹¹ The letter even warned that the new Ottoman regulations could have breached mutually signed political protocols by the two states.⁴⁹² Though the Ottoman state had the right to impose the teaching of a specific language or religious belief in its own schools, such impositions on Christian schools, which were funded by the American people for the sole purpose of teaching Christians, according to the letter, could not be lawful at all.⁴⁹³ Almost a year later, the Ottoman Porte informed the Foreign Ministry that upon the Sultan's order all foreign and non-Muslim schools had been notified about the benefits and significance of Turkish instruction. Additionally, the Porte's letter indicated the suspension of the obligatory Turkish instruction in non-Muslim schools.⁴⁹⁴

From the Hamidian state's point of view, Turkish language instruction had a strategic importance. Turkish instruction was seen as an extension of the state's presence. The lack of

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ (...*muhbir bulundurarak şâgirdanın dereceyi osmaniyedeki tahsillerini tahkik etmek...*)

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ BOA: Dosya No: 580 Gömlek No: 43486/2 Fon Kodu: BEO. [02. 28. 1895].

⁴⁹² BOA: Dosya No: 580, Gömlek No: 43486/3, Fon Kodu: BEO. [02. 20. 1895].

⁴⁹³ Ibid

⁴⁹⁴ BOA: Dosya No: 641 Gömlek No: 48013/2, Fon Kodu: BEO. Tarih: [06.08. 1895].

Turkish instruction at any school within the Empire's domain was viewed with suspicion. Therefore, the state resorted to whatever means it could to guarantee the infiltration of Turkish in foreign and non-Muslim schools in its domain. After the temporary suspension of obligatory Turkish instruction, the Hamidian state started giving incentives to Christian schools for teaching Turkish. So, it was only a few months later, in Balkan territories, that non-Muslim middle schools (*rüşdiye*) were promised official recognition and financial support if they complied with the state's language policies.⁴⁹⁵

How one can be certain that the Hamidian state's focus on language represented anything other than its security concerns? Were the state's anxieties in any ways nationalistic? As mentioned earlier, if Benedict Anderson is right, official nationalism was "developed *after*, and *in reaction to*, the popular national movements proliferating in Europe since 1820s." In some ways, the later Ottoman state's nationalism similar to that of other empires. The special weight that the Ottoman state ascribed to the official language was connected to the spread of nationalism since language has been a battlegrounds for competing nationalisms.

The ideological approach to language is clearly manifested in the concerns of Ottoman officials. A fascinating letter written by the Vali of Ankara to the Ottoman Education Ministry in 1895 unveils the Ottoman official's conception of a unified language as the guarantor of state unity.⁴⁹⁶ In his letter, the Vali offers a counter strategy to what he sees as the spread and success of Armenian and Greek languages in the educational sphere, specifically in their private Anatolian schools. The Vali states that up to a few years ago the Greeks and Armenians in Adana could only communicate in Turkish. However, just in few years, they were able to spread their

⁴⁹⁵ BOA: Dosya No: 308, Gömlek, No: 32, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 18/L/1313 (Hicri)[01.04.1896].

⁴⁹⁶ BOA: Dosya No:279, Gömlek No:18, Fon Kodu: MF. MKT. Tarih: [6/10/1895].

language successfully even in Anatolia. Now, their children easily communicate in their own languages.⁴⁹⁷ To the Vali, this amounted to a great loss and a threat. Therefore, he asserted that the state must act immediately and had to use its financial and spiritual means to bring those non-Muslim schools under its control to educate them in accordance with its own policies. If the state delayed, warned the Vali, its non-Muslim subjects (*zir destan*) might entirely lose their Ottoman feelings (*hissiyat*) and costumes, as had happened before in Izmir and Edirne.⁴⁹⁸ In the last paragraph of his letter, the Vali indicated that though it was beyond his authority to take up such a role, yet, he had allocated some money for teaching Turkish to non-Muslims. He then concludes that the Education Ministry should take full control over⁴⁹⁹ non-Muslim schools with compassion (*dilnevazi*) and “spread Turkish” among them, since “spreading (*vüsat*) the language constitutes one of the foundations⁵⁰⁰ of the state’s unity.”⁵⁰¹

It must be kept in mind that the Ottoman state’s linguistic Turkification policies do not appear different when it comes to dealing with its Muslim subjects. During the Hamidian regime, linguistic and cultural activities became the subject of much tougher measures in general. Before Abdülhamid came to power, the state had mostly resorted to giving incentives and awarding all Muslim and non-Muslim subjects for their efforts in learning Turkish.⁵⁰² In some instances, officials rewarded parents for teaching Turkish to their children.⁵⁰³ Along with this, in 1870, the Education Ministry pushed for teaching Turkish and adopting it as a medium of communication

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ (*nüfuzu şamile tehtine alması*)

⁵⁰⁰ (*vahdeti mulkiye esaslarindan*).

⁵⁰¹ BOA: Dosya No: 279, Gömlek No: 18, Fon Kodu: MF. MKT. Tarih: [6/10/1895].

⁵⁰² BOA: Dosya No: 12, Gömlek No: 99, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT Tarih: 26/Ca/1290 (Hicrî) [22.07.1873].

⁵⁰³ BOA: Dosya No: 12, Gömlek No: 99, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 26/Ca/1290 (Hicrî) [22.07.1873]

and instruction in various academic and scientific institutions like the medical academy and observatories— and to replace French with Turkish.⁵⁰⁴ Some instructors resisted the language change in the Imperial Medical Academy and insisted that the lack of a sufficient number of medical doctors had nothing to do with non-Turkish instruction.⁵⁰⁵ In addition, there were still not enough textbooks available in Turkish.⁵⁰⁶ (The report does not specify whether or not there were foreign professors among those who opposed the language change). However, the committee agreed with instructors. The committee’s report, to the *Seresker*, the Defense Minister, indicated that “originally foreign language was adopted because there were no Turkish instructors who could teach medicine.”⁵⁰⁷ The report also maintains that the lack of Turkish medical textbooks and instructors “did not mean that there was no obligation to teach in Turkish unless to do otherwise was unfeasible.”⁵⁰⁸ Whatever the reason “for neglecting obligatory Turkish instruction might have been,” stated the report, “the gradual use of foreign language eventually” replaced Turkish instruction in its entirety.⁵⁰⁹

The Ottoman intelligentsia provided theoretical grounds for many of these Turkification measures. Therefore, the state’s policies, in many ways, were foregrounded in the overall growing nationalistic tendencies among the elite. As stated earlier, a closer study of the Ottoman documents and literature with respect to linguistic issues should lead one to conclude that the Ottoman elite were not contemptuous of the Turks and Turkishness. On the contrary, they were

⁵⁰⁴ Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 622, Gömlek No: 43260, Fon Kodu: İ.DH. Tarih: 04/Ş /1287(Hicrî) [28.10.1870]; BOA: Dosya No: 31, Gömlek No: 77, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 13/Ş /1292 (Hicrî) [1975].

⁵⁰⁵ BOA: Dosya No: 622, Gömlek No: 43260, Fon Kodu: İ.DH. Tarih: 04/Ş /1287(Hicrî) [28.10.1870]

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

proud to promote Turkishness and Turkification policies, especially from the 1870s onward. For instance, in 1871, in a laudatory column, the Ottoman journal *Terakki* regarded the replacement of French instruction by Turkish, in the Imperial Medical Academy, as “a colossal change (*tebdili cesime*).”⁵¹⁰ These changes had engendered debates among the elite, especially after some people had expressed their dissatisfaction with the replacement of French in the study of medicine. Apparently, some Ottoman medical doctors, along with foreign journalists, had raised questions about whether Turkish was sufficiently developed⁵¹¹ to be employed for medical studies.⁵¹² These debates clearly unveil the prevalence of Orientalist and philological approaches to language. Also, the justifications for Turkifying the educational system manifest important traces of the growing nationalist sentiments.

These discussions on the replacement of French were replete with nationalistic expressions. The arguments for Turkish instruction were mostly nationalistic, even when such arguments were made in the form of analyzing the costs and benefits of foreign language learning. Writers of the Ottoman journal *Terakki*, who seem to be among the major proponents of both language reform and Turkification of the education system, saw resistance to Turkification as unpatriotic, if not stemming from outright ignorance. In an article titled *taaccüp* (astonishment), the columnist sounds appalled that there could be Turkish doctors arguing in favor of keeping French. Thus, he states:

It is regretful (*taasıf olunur*) to see that there are Ottomans who even resist the idea of the translation of the science of medicine into Turkish (*fen tîbin türkçe tercümesi*). Because what is expected from any individual is to demonstrate some zeal (*gayret*) and

⁵¹⁰ *Terakki*, (No: 2; February 17, 1871).

⁵¹¹ *Lisani turkinin edemi vus'ati*

⁵¹² *Terakki*, (No: 18; April 7, 1871).

patriotism (*hamiyet*) about the nation to which s/he belongs.⁵¹³

It is hinted that the intent behind the reforms was primarily to preserve Turkish language and dress. The foreign journalists' argument against Turkish instruction is seen as normal.⁵¹⁴ However, some compatriots' resistance to Turkish is viewed as troublesome since it could signify either their lack of patriotic zeal or lack of appreciation for education in Turkish. Nonetheless, the article asserts that the first was not the case. So, their resistance had to be rooted in their lack of self-confidence⁵¹⁵ since it is 'obvious' that

every nation has to safeguard its language and its costumes and has to be proud with the progress of its language. If we say that our language is not reformable and incapable of incorporating (*ihate*) [the technical terms of] the science of medicine, we make ourselves laughable before Westerners (*ferankler*)... These types of talks, which patently signify the lack of knowledge, are against the interest of the sons of our nation (*abnay-i vetan*) ... It is just astonishing to find those who still hold such unsound views in this era.⁵¹⁶

With the passage of time, these views become more entrenched. In 1875, the state made it a requirement for every secondary school (*rüşdiye*) in the empire to receive a copy of *Takvim-i Vekayi* on a regular basis.⁵¹⁷ This new requirement aimed at helping this age group of students to become accustomed to reading Turkish.⁵¹⁸ Introducing newspapers to school students was necessitated, as Anderson's would say, by a certain "mode of apprehending the world."⁵¹⁹

In 1878, just two years after Abdülhamid's accession to power, the journal *Tercüman-ı*

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ BOA : Dosya No: 22, Gömlek No: 142, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 08/Za/1291(Hicrî) [16.01.1875].

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*: 22.

Hakikat Weekly,⁵²⁰ appeared. Unlike *Takvim-i Vekayi*, this new weekly journal was published exclusively for students in secondary schools. *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly* provides a window into Turkish official nationalism, Turkish self-perception of the time. This journal helps to grasp the ways in which these phenomena were inserted into or reflected in the students' reading materials.

The journal was published by a group of intellectuals who were heavily under the influence of the new philological views on race, language, and progress discussed earlier. Therefore, the diglossic display of language in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly* is one of the more fascinating aspects of this paper. In general, it focuses on language reform. In a number of issues, an important portion of the journal is devoted to questions directed at students, such as: What is the origin of the Ottoman language? Does the Ottoman language need reform? Can it be purged of Arabic and Persian vocabulary and grammar? And finally, how should this language reform take place?⁵²¹ Some of the responses to the above questions were published, since their content, we are told, corresponded with the publishers' politics of language. The publisher awarded these respondents by giving them a book titled *Philology*⁵²² for their contributions.⁵²³

The journal does not claim to be the first to initiate such a reform. On the contrary, the publishers seem to be grateful to changes due to some language reforms that had been initiated at least 15 years earlier. In one of these articles, it is stated that their current "literacy progress" had

⁵²⁰ Its complete title was *Tercüman-ı Hakikat: Mekatib-i Rüşdiye şakirdanı için Haftada Bir Kere Neşrolunur* (published once a week for students in the secondary schools). Therefore, hereafter, it will be referred to as *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly*, to differentiate this publication from the other *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. The latter was published for the general public by the same group of people from 1878 to 1921.

⁵²¹ See: *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly*. (No: 4-7, 1878).

⁵²² Most likely Sami wrote this book on philology. As mentioned earlier, he himself had indicated that his book on philology was the first on this topic in Turkish.

⁵²³ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly*. (P. 3; No: 7; November 11, 1878).

become possible as a result of the previous 15 years of purging Turkish of Arabic and Persian vocabulary, without which “we would have still used those meaningless (*soğuk ve tatsız*) Arabic and Persian words.”⁵²⁴ The article, however, does not refer to any individual or group who had been involved in those language purification efforts.⁵²⁵ We are told that it was not possible to do away with much of the Arabic and Persian vocabulary. However, most Arabic and Persian grammar could be weeded out of Turkish.⁵²⁶

Probably the most important aspect of the *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly* is the weight it ascribes to Turkish language at the expense of other languages. In this journal, Turkish is usually referred to as the mother tongue of students who attend Ottoman secondary schools. The Turkishness of Muslim students is taken for granted. The hierarchical classification of the languages is also treated as a natural thing. For instance, references to the Arabic language surface in a series of articles but their appearance is relational. Arabic is talked about in relation to Turkish and discussed in the context of its usefulness to Turkish learning.⁵²⁷ There is a section on *Serf* (Arabic *Sarf*: grammar/conjugation) in most of the issues of the journal. The section starts with the justification for the discussion on *Serf*. We are told that the Ottoman students could study *Serf* for two reasons: a) to read Arabic books, and b) to learn “our language better,” which relies on Arabic, and that “our investigation here takes place for the second reason.”⁵²⁸

The way the writers of this journal contextualize the Turkish language is very revealing,

⁵²⁴ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly*. (P. 1-2, No: 2, October 17, 1878)

⁵²⁵ Gökalp particularly praises two instructors in Darülfünun: Ahmet Vefik Paşa (1823- 1891) and Süleyman Hüsnü Paşa; (1838-1892) for their pioneering role in this regard. See; Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları/ the Principles of Turkism*, 8-10.

⁵²⁶ Ibid. (P. 3-4; No: 7; November 11, 1878).

⁵²⁷ Ibid. (P. 5; No: 3; October 24, 1878)

⁵²⁸ Ibid (P.4; No: 6; November 14, 1878).

and can unveil a great deal about the ideological intent behind the paper's publication and the language politics of the time. Turkish is generally referred to as "our language" along with references to the empire's domains as "our homeland,"⁵²⁹ as if the empire was a single nation and Turkish was its only language. For instance, someone by the name of Nazim writes that

the wellbeing of *our homeland* (*vetanimizin*) is my highest wish...therefore, as my obligation to the sons of *my race*,⁵³⁰ I am ready to proudly acknowledge...that as long as the Ottoman grammar is not reformed in accordance with the spirit of *our language* (*lisaniminizin ruhu*)...not only does it cost *our citizens* (*vetandaşlarımızın*) their progress in the literary field, but in all other types of scientific endeavors as well. For those who appreciate the value of *our language*, this is a matter of an extraordinary grief...if *our language's* grammar comes to be known with all clarity and simplicity ...and the modern press and newspapers observe these rules...[then] no matter how long it may take ... it will be the cause (*asbabı*) for the progress of *our nation*.⁵³¹
(Emphasis added)

These remarks not only throw into question all claims about ethnic Turks' lack of self-consciousness but also highlight the validity of Makdisi's insights regarding Ottoman Orientalism. It is clear that this literature, which was officially sanctioned and provided for the Ottoman schools, either does not see the non-Turkish population as noteworthy, or explicitly excludes them from "our citizens, our progress, our race and our homeland."

The above behaviors and attitudes of the ruling ethnicity are further evidenced by the casual disregard of the presence of non-Turks in the schools or in society at large. For example, in an article in which the importance of women's education and its impact on the learning of one's mother tongue is being discussed, it is implied that every student in the Ottoman schools was a Turk and his/her mother tongue was Turkish. So, when the writer of the articles asks rhetorically, whom did you learn Turkish from? "Without any doubts, you will reply, from our

⁵²⁹ Ibid.,1-2.

⁵³⁰ (*Ohdeyi çakiraneme duşan hayiri min gayri hadd abnavi cinsme.*)

⁵³¹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly*. (Pp. 1-2; No: 6; November 14, 1878).

mothers,”⁵³² he adds. This ‘taken-for-grantedness’ is observable in all the issues of this publication.⁵³³ In another piece, which defines progress teleologically to mean that each generation supersedes the previous one, it is stated that for a child whose “father only knows his own language, *which is Ottoman*,”⁵³⁴ progress meant learning the required foreign languages; i.e. European languages.⁵³⁵

As indicated earlier, it seems that the nature of Ottoman subjects’ relationship to the state was increasingly determined by their reception or rejection of the Turkish language. This becomes abundantly clear in a piece in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly*, which attends to the significance of language learning. It is stated that “Jewish and Christians schools in our homeland (*vetanimizda bulunan*) are now keen in teaching Ottoman language, which means *they are trying to advance their current citizenry*⁵³⁶ *relationship with us*.”⁵³⁷ It should be reiterated that this journal constitutes part of the reading material for Ottoman secondary schools. However, it highlights the nature of power relations in Ottoman society in the late 1870s. It also explains who “we” are, or whose language is celebrated, and which language plays what role in the Ottoman state-society relations. Moreover, this “we,” which stands for the Ottoman Turks, reveals the identity of the sovereign. Turkish is not only declared as a marker of the sovereign’s identity but also becomes a yardstick for determining the degree of the citizenship of others in

⁵³² Ibid. (p. 7, No: 1, October 29, 1878)

⁵³³ It must be stated that I consulted only 15 issues of this paper (from issue:1-15).

⁵³⁴ Emphases added.

⁵³⁵ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat Weekly*. (p. 5, No: 2, October 17, 1878)

⁵³⁶ *Hemşehri* could mean a compatriot or citizen, but citizen seems to make more sense in this context. In modern Turkish, citizen is *vetandaş*, not *hemşehri*; now, the later only means fellow country person.

⁵³⁷ (*demek oluyor ki onlar bizimle hemşehrilik munasebetlerini şimdiki derecesinde artırmak istiyorlar*) Ibid. (P. 2, No: 2, October, 17, 1878)

this hierarchical socio-political context. Here, non-Muslims' advancement towards full citizenship or subjecthood is obviously tied to the efforts they put into learning "our language." There is no doubt, however, that this state of limbo of non-Muslim citizenship turns it into something that is either conditional or in progress; as such it has been deferred to the future. The social standing of non-Turkish Muslims has also been obscured. Their presence cannot be imagined unless they are thought of as being a part of "us". This is the case since the criterion for citizenship or subject hood is Turkish language, not Islam (alone). It is Turkish instruction or learning that could improve non-Muslims' socio-political standing and pave the path for progress toward full citizenship.

After Abdülhamid's accession to power, the focus on Turkish significantly intensified. The Hamidian regime introduced more rigorous language policies in order to give a central role to Turkish in its education system. In 1881, in order to emphasize the importance of Turkish,⁵³⁸ the Ministry of Education ordered the removal of French from the first year of the middle schools and as well as its overall reevaluation and reduction in the higher grades.⁵³⁹ However, French still kept its prominence along with Turkish in official correspondence, issuing passports and other bureaucratic matters. During the reign of Abdülhamid, Turkish occupied a much greater space in the state policies; so did education itself.⁵⁴⁰ However, as mentioned earlier, it was still the continuation of a trend that had started much earlier.

The Ottoman state imagined itself as Turkish or saw Turks as its fundamental element, as Abdülhamid once put it. At least by the mid-19th century, the Turkishness of the state or Turkish

⁵³⁸ (*Türkçeye önem verilmesi*) BOA: Dosya No: 68, Gömlek No: 15, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 12/L/1298 (Hicrî) [06.09.1881].

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*(New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

as the official language of the state was ‘taken for granted and this is manifested time and again in the state’s practices all over the empire. State records attest to the fact that the Ottoman elite saw their language as the official one, long before its constitutional stipulation in 1876. However, it is hard to tell when exactly they started referring to Turkish as the official language (*resmi dil*). Yet, if “the official language” and “the state’s language” have the same connotations, Ottoman records show that the latter was in use as early as 1847.⁵⁴¹ Henceforth, the term was in use regularly.⁵⁴² This declarative aspect, however, only sheds light on one angle of the Ottoman state’s practice. In reality, the Turkification of bureaucratic language, no matter its pace or success, was an ongoing process in the 19th century.

As early as 1861, the Highest Council of Judicial Regulations (*Meclis-i Valay-ı Ahkam-ı Adliye*) decreed that all records in penal system were to be kept in Turkish.⁵⁴³ As a letter by the Vali of Bagdad indicates, the Sublime Porte expected the new law to go into effect immediately. However, the Local Council ostensibly did not believe in the practicality of the new law and therefore requested its modifications.⁵⁴⁴ The Local Council of the Vilayet elucidated that the suspects (*ashabi tohmet*) only knew Arabic. Therefore, they should be required to sign the Turkish paperwork only after the content of their interrogation records was explained to them in their native language(s).⁵⁴⁵ Another document indicates that the suspects and criminal offenders knew either Arabic or Kurdish or Persian but had no familiarity with Turkish.⁵⁴⁶ Hence, even in

⁵⁴¹ BOA: Dosya No: 91 Gömlek No:52 Fon Kodu: A.}MKT. Tarih: 14/Ş /1263 (Hicrî) [28.07.1847]

⁵⁴² Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 1015, Gömlek No:70, Fon Kodu: MVL Tarih: 23/S /1282 (Hicrî) [16.07.1865].

⁵⁴³ BOA: Dosya No: 534, Gömlek No: 39, Fon Kodu: A.}MKT.UM.. Tarih: 19/B /1278 (Hicrî) [21.01.1862].

⁵⁴⁴ BOA: Dosya No: 761, Gömlek No: 8, Fon Kodu: MVL. Tarih: [5.12.1861] ; also see: BOA: Dosya No: 761, Gömlek No: 8, Fon Kodu: MVL. Tarih: [26.11.1861].

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ BOA: Dosya No: 761, Gömlek No: 8, Fon Kodu: MVL. Tarih: [1.12.1861].

non-Turkish regions, the interrogation forms (*istintakname*lere) were kept in Turkish.⁵⁴⁷ Such policies not only reveal the place of Turkish in the state practice but also signify the eventual goal of the Turkification of the entire bureaucratic system. Had these policies proven successful, their implications would have been grave for the non-Turkish regions of the empire. Eventually, illiteracy in Turkish would have become a great impediment to the entry of non-Turks into the state bureaucracy even in their own localities. After a certain period, those who could hold sensitive positions would have to be either Turkish or well versed in Turkish language.

It should be noted that the state documents show that in a big Vilayet like Baghdad, the Turkish literacy of the general population was almost non-existent.⁵⁴⁸ However, they would have to interact with a penal system that communicated only in a foreign language. These attempts at Turkification were not taking place “for increasing administrative efficiency through the use of a single language”⁵⁴⁹ as Turkish nationalists claim. As Charles Taylor, in a slightly different context, puts it, arguments for the efficiency of a single language in a multilingual context “are generally technological pretexts for chauvinism that does not declare itself openly.”⁵⁵⁰ Based on the state records these linguistic regulations engendered some problems rather than solutions. For example, when inmates appear before judge they question⁵⁵¹ the accuracy of their paperwork and claim that their records did not reflect what they confessed to before their trial.⁵⁵²

In his insightful paper on Turkification, Mahmud Haddad notes that “Abdülhamid

⁵⁴⁷ BOA: Dosya No: 761, Gömlek No: 8, Fon Kodu: MVL. Tarih: [5.12.1861].

⁵⁴⁸ BOA: Dosya No: 761, Gömlek No: 8, Fon Kodu: MVL. Tarih: [26.11.1861].

⁵⁴⁹ Cf. Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 67.

⁵⁵⁰ Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," 222.

⁵⁵¹ I am just assuming that it might have been before the judge, the records do not explain where the denial might have taken place

⁵⁵² BOA: Dosya No: 761, Gömlek No: 8, Fon Kodu: MVL. Tarih: [1.12.1861]

decreed for the first time that Turkish be the language of correspondence among the different branches of the provincial administration.”⁵⁵³ He bases his claim on a report published by al-Ahram in 1913.⁵⁵⁴ Turkification in correspondence between different branches of the government reached a new level in the Hamidian period. However, as the state records reveal, this tradition had existed long before Abdülhamid’s reign. The phrase “official language” appears in state records in the early 1870s. In that period Turkish was regarded as the official language. Nonetheless, the context of such utterances is worthy of a greater attention. It seems there was often an association between the context of these utterances and the state’s assimilationist policies or ‘Ottoman Orientalism.’ For instance, in 1874, there was a project to establish a teacher’s college (*darülmualimin*) in Syria, in order to train enough teachers for elementary (*sıbyan*) and secondary schools (*rüşdiye*), in highly populated Arabic neighborhoods.⁵⁵⁵ The primary goal of this project was to “prepare teachers capable of teaching the official language”; i.e. Turkish.⁵⁵⁶ It is worth noting that, in general, this was the context of declaring Turkish as “the language of the state” since 1847—when, for the first time, a Turkish school was going to open in Africa.⁵⁵⁷

Up to 1876, the context of the use of these phrases generally reveals some type of interactions between the state and the non-Turkish populations of the empire. However, these interactions either, as in the above example, render the state a modernizing agent, or, enunciate and reinforce the state’s own ethnic identity. The latter phenomenon is visible in the prominence

⁵⁵³ Mahmoud Haddad, "The Rise of Arab Nationalism Reconsidered," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 2 (May, 1994): 203.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ (*Arablarla meskun mahallerde*)

⁵⁵⁶ BOA: Dosya No: 21, Gömlek No: 107, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 17/L /1291 (Hicrî) [1874].

⁵⁵⁷ BOA: Dosya No: 91 Gömlek No: 52 Fon Kodu: A.}MKT. Tarih: 14/Ş /1263 (Hicrî) [28.07.1847]

that Ottoman officials gave to Turkish. For instance, in 1875, in an Arab city like Beirut, the Ottoman officials fired an Arab teacher merely for his unfamiliarity with “the official language” and replaced him with someone who knew Turkish.⁵⁵⁸

By the 1890s, the state’s linguistic Turkification policies had rapidly evolved. In this period, Turkish no longer holds its ambiguous status. By this time, the state clearly uses its language as a means of assimilation. For instance, in an Arab city like Basra, if a teacher could teach Turkish in a middle school, he was not required to know Arabic. He would not be forced to take any Arabic courses either. Nor would he be replaced with another teacher who knew both Arabic and Turkish.⁵⁵⁹ The justification is even more telling: according to the new regulations (*talimat gereği*) starting with the elementary, all schools had to be reformed and all students were required to get used⁵⁶⁰ to Turkish.⁵⁶¹ By 1893, every school in the empire, whether in Istanbul or elsewhere, had to follow the same guidelines. The year 1894, when the Government initiated a project for a full-scale reform (*ıslah*) of Turkish (*Türk lisanı*) language, seems to be another pivotal point in the state’s policy of accelerating Turkification. It ordered the establishment of various scientific associations (*cemiyet-i ilmiyyeler açılması*).⁵⁶² Based on these new regulations, Turkish was the first thing that each student had to learn in school. In addition, the state strove to universalize (make it the language of all subjects), and determine the periods of education (*tahsil müddetleri*), the subject matters (*müfredatı*), the content of the lessons, and the

⁵⁵⁸ BOA: Dosya No: 31 Gömlek No: 25 Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 06/Ş /1292 (Hicrî) [06.09.1875].

⁵⁵⁹ (*Basra Rüşdiyesi mualliminin Arapça bilmeyip Türkçe eğitim yapması talimat gereği olduğundan ayrıca Arapça bilen bir muallim tayinine gerek olmadığı*): BOA : Dosya No: 119, Gömlek No: 77, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 17/Z /1307 (Hicrî) [03.08.1890].

⁵⁶⁰ (*çocukların Türkçe’ye alıştırmaları*)

⁵⁶¹ Ibid

⁵⁶² BOA: Dosya No: 29 Gömlek No: 1312/RA099 Fon Kodu: İ..HUS. Tarih: 28/Ra/1312 (Hicrî) [28.09.1894]. This once again shows that the Republican elite’s obsession with language reform had much deeper roots in the past.

tutions (*ücretleri*) throughout the empire.⁵⁶³

In the Hamidian period, language-based discrimination became increasingly worse. Hence, to claim that in 1900 “the Ottoman educational system did not pay attention to ethnicity and differences of language. Instead, it stressed the unity of faith in order to keep together all of the Muslim subjects of the empire,”⁵⁶⁴ flies in direct contrast to what Ottoman records reveal. There are various examples of the state’s repressive policies favoring the universalization of Turkish. For instance, in 1896, the Minister of Education sent a warning to the local branch of the Education Department (*mudiriyet*) in Beirut, remarking that Turkish was not being taught there with due diligence.⁵⁶⁵ He added that he had learned that teachers were chosen from among those who were not up to the task of teaching Turkish.⁵⁶⁶ He noted that since the official language was Turkish, all elementary students must learn Turkish. Moreover, learning Turkish was necessitated by the fact that after elementary school all the lessons were in Turkish.⁵⁶⁷ He went on to say that while foreign and non-Muslim schools were complying with the requirements of Turkish instruction, Muslim schools remained indolent. For him, Turkish language competence was to be of a particular (*bilhasse*) consideration in hiring all the teachers.⁵⁶⁸ Even those teachers who were hired and paid by the local people had to be summoned and reoriented based on these new regulations. In the event of non-compliance they were to be removed from their jobs and those who had hired them were to be properly informed in accordance with the

⁵⁶³ For the details see: BOA: Dosya No: 2, Gömlek No: 82, Fon Kodu: Y.PRK.MF.. Tarih: 29/Z/1310 (Hicrî) [13.07.1893].

⁵⁶⁴ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 63.

⁵⁶⁵ BOA: Dosya No: 309, Gömlek No: 20, Fon Kodu: MF. MKT. Tarih: [5.3.1896].

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

local customs.⁵⁶⁹

By the turn of the century, in the school environment the state had become extremely intolerant toward non-Turkish languages. The following are some excerpts of a formal letter to the lieutenant governor in Deir ez- Zor, which highlights the value attached to Turkish by the state. The letter warns

we have learned that the lieutenant governor does not agree with Turkish instruction in the elementary and middle schools since *the textbooks are all in Turkish*, which have been assigned by the Ministry of Education...instead he has personally assigned Arabic books on Arabic language, which have been printed in Beirut...*in the well-protected domain of the Empire, like any other country, education and all other bureaucratic works must be in the official language that is Ottoman...*the value of opening schools...*is as much in universalizing (te'mim) the state's official language (develetin resmi lisani) as it is the spread of knowledge itself...the use of any book, in any school: elementary, middle or high school is categorically banned; unless it is in the state's official language and it has been assigned by the Ministry of Education.*⁵⁷⁰ (Emphasis added)

The language Turkification policies of the Ottoman state clearly display some sort of longevity and a traceable history. The state's policies with regards to language, especially from the early 1870s onward, manifest all the signs of modern governmentality. In the Hamidian period language became a handy tool for the state assimilationist policies. Thus, Haddad's description of Abdülhamid's Turkification policies is accurate when he asserts that Abdülhamid

employed Turks rather than Arab Syrians in some sectors of the local administration and apparently Turkified the higher positions of the local civil and judiciary bureaucracies. Under his rule, many teachers in state secondary schools (*rüşdiye*), including teachers of Arabic, were Turks sent from non-Arab provinces.

The culmination of this trend is visible in 1910, when the Baghdad governorate declared that since the state's official language was Turkish, it would not accept any petition in any

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ BOA : Dosya No: 446, Gömlek No: 41, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 20/Z /1316 (Hicrî) [30.04.1899].

language other than Turkish.⁵⁷¹ Seeing the people's reaction, however, the Ministry of Interior revised this policy and asked the local officials to adopt a more lenient strategy toward the Arab population of the Vilayet. However, it insisted in its later directives that no petitions in Arabic should be accepted from Ottoman subjects of Iranian, Chaldean, and Jewish origins.⁵⁷² The documents instruct the local officials that they must do their best to universalize (*ta'mim*) Turkish. They were to follow this course since even the sudden introduction of the new law—save a few opportunists (*menfaatperest*)—had not angered anyone.⁵⁷³ However, they were still advised to act moderately, since the majority of people in that region did not know Turkish.⁵⁷⁴ This also indicates the fact that previous directives had mandated that every member in the City Council of Baghdad know Turkish. Yet, the letter suggested that it was more advisable to take people's sensitivities into consideration and to relax those rules for the time being.⁵⁷⁵

There were similar attempts by the state in other areas of life, which rendered that with the progression of time, the systematic Turkification of the language domain became increasingly invasive. Another area which showcases the state's language Turkification policies was the shrinking of space for cultural and literary production by dominated Muslim groups such as the Albanians and the Kurds. In reading Ottoman archival records, one finds much greater restrictions on issuing publication permits to non-Turkish journals and papers. Before the 1870s, this 'diglossic power relation' was still "hidden"⁵⁷⁶ to the extent that local councils could give

⁵⁷¹ BOA: Dosya No: 103/-2, Gömlek No: 1, Fon Kodu: DH.MUİ. Tarih: 06/C /1328 (Hicrî) [14.06.1910]

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ (*Belediye Meclisi'ne gireceklerin Türkçe bilmelerinin şart olduğu*). Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ For more on hidden diglossic power relation see, Schjerve and Vetter, "Historical Sociolinguistics and Multilingualism: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in the Development of a Multifunctional Framework," 40.

publication permits even to foreigners.⁵⁷⁷ However, in later periods, the room for non-Turkish Muslim groups' cultural activities became increasingly slim. In the 1870s, there seems to be an important shift in the state's policy about regulating print and publication. To a certain degree, the Hamidian state inherited its paranoia and vigilantism from the preceding regulatory tradition(s). In the early 1870s, the state was the sole publisher and distributor of the Qur'an itself and did not allow its import or its distribution by anyone or any groups.⁵⁷⁸ Only the Ministry of Education (*Maarif*) had the authority to print the Qur'an, be it in part or in whole. Thus, it seems the Hamidian state had inherited some of its restrictive policies from its immediate predecessors.⁵⁷⁹ However, the pressure on non-Turkish cultural activity became monumental in the Hamidian era, to a degree which turned the dawn of the 20th century into the dusk for non-Turkish Muslim publications. These restrictions reached a point where even traditional religious books, notwithstanding their prior legal permits, were to be collected.⁵⁸⁰ The state's hostility to non-Turkish books and publications, particularly to those of Kurds and Albanians, increased greatly. The state ordered the Customs and Border Patrols to bar the import of Kurdish and Albanian books even if they came with their legal permits (*resmi ruhsatı olsa bile*).⁵⁸¹ When the Ministry of Education made an inquiry as to why Albanian and Kurdish dictionaries and alphabetical books should be collected, the Palace replied: "printing and

⁵⁷⁷ For instance, in 1862 the regional council of Kurdistan (*Kürdistan Meclisi*) gave a license to a certain Şemail Refail to publish books in Arabic, Armenian, Chaldean, Kurdish, and French in Kurdistan. See: BOA: Dosya No: 479, Gömlek No: 21725, Fon Kodu: İ..MVL, Tarih: 08/B /1279 (Hicrî) [29.12.1862]

⁵⁷⁸ In 1872: (*Mesahif-i şerifenin basılmasına, ithal ve ihracına yasak olmasından dolayı izin verilemeyeceği*) see: BOA: Dosya No: 4, Gömlek No: 66, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 30/C 1289/(Hicrî) [1872]; and in 1873: BOA: Dosya No: 8, Gömlek No: 99, Fon Kodu: MF.MKT. Tarih: 25/Za/1289 /(Hicrî) [1873]; also in the Hamidian period: BOA: Dosya No: 48 Tarih: 23/R /1294/ [1877]. Gömlek No: 67 Fon Kodu: MF.MKT.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ BOA: Dosya No: 1097, Gömlek No: 41, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 15/Ca/1324 (Hicrî) [08.07.1906].

⁵⁸¹ BOA: Dosya No: 5, Gömlek No: 32, Fon Kodu: Y..PRK.MF. Tarih: 29/Z /1325 (Hicrî) [02.02.1908].

disseminating such books in Albanian and Kurdish languages, is extremely (*fewkaladeh*) harmful to the state's policies."⁵⁸²

There are many scholars who defend the view that the above political trend, notwithstanding its intensity and longevity, was nothing more than innocent centralization attempts on behalf of the Ottoman state.⁵⁸³ They see the Ottoman state's effort to universalize its language as free of nationalism and argue that it was simply a policy of centralization. Centralization as a policy was the outgrowth of a certain worldview that deemed it necessary to homogenize the polity in a way that was unmanageable otherwise. Even if this enterprise was informed only by the bureaucratic manageability of the population, the compartmentalization of existing languages, privileging the language of the ruling ethnic groups over the rest was neither arbitrary nor innocent. Contrary to commonly held views, Ottoman officials denied neither their ethnic lineage, nor the value they attached to their own language. Nonetheless, the most innocent sounding attempts at identity formation by a state are not free of nationalism, and even if a state "denies particularistic ethnic loyalties or subordinates them, it has itself to create its own sense of belonging, and it does this very often for instance to the mother country or the fatherland."⁵⁸⁴

As indicated earlier, at the heart of this denial of Ottoman/Turkish national consciousness there exists a claim to Muslim communities' ethnic or national amnesia caused by their religion. It is important to remember that Namik Kemal, the most prominent Ottoman figure who adamantly advocated for the revival of Islamic identity, also defended Turkification and the destruction (*imha*) of non-Turkish identities. In 1878, arguing in favor of restricting non-Turkish

⁵⁸² BOA: Dosya No: 1097, Gömlek No: 41, Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 15/Ca/1324 (Hicrî) [08.07.1906].

⁵⁸³ Cf. Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁵⁸⁴ John Rex quoted in: Ruth Wodak et al, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, Critical Discourse Analysis Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 20.

languages, in a poem titled *Vaten*, homeland, Kemal asks: “if it is doable, except for Turkish, why should not we eliminate⁵⁸⁵ all the existing languages...in our homeland?...Is it right to hand [non-Turks their] grammar books that could be used as spiritual weapons for [the] disintegration?”⁵⁸⁶ One might think that Kemal’s religious devotion made him disregard ethnic and linguistic factors and that he therefore privileged Turkish over other languages only for practical reasons. However, he does not leave any room for such a misreading. So, he writes that “language is even a firmer (*metin*) deterrent than religion to an ethnic group’s (*kavm*) rebellion against the other.”⁵⁸⁷

It is striking to see that even Namik Kemal believed in the instrumental use of religion. However, what is even more fascinating is the then widespread belief among intellectuals in the assimilatory power of language. Kemal goes on to say that we cannot

universalize (*te‘mim*) our language among Bulgarians and Greeks but it is very much possible to do this *among Muslims* such as Albanians and Lazes. This becomes a reality only by the application of the right strategies; it is possible with opening schools. *In 20 years, even by the implementation of our current insufficient educational laws, languages like Albanian and Laz will be completely forgotten.*⁵⁸⁸ (Emphasis added)

The Ottoman Muslim intellectuals’ attempt at and hope for eliminating non-Turkish languages constitute the real socio-political and cultural background of the Hamidian Islamic discourse and Islamic unity. The influence of the Young Ottomans on Abdülhamid is well known.

3. Nationalism and the Politics of Pan-Islamism

⁵⁸⁵ *Mevetemek iktiza ederken.*

⁵⁸⁶ Mesut Yeğen in his introduction to: Bayrak, *Şark Islahat Planı Kürtlere Vurulan Kelepçe/ The Eastern Reform Plan as a Handcuff for the Kurds*: 13.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

The disastrous Ottoman defeat at the hands of Russians during the 1877-1878 War is generally cited as one of the overarching causes for the Hamidian regime's redefinition of Ottoman identity along religious lines. This defeat resulted in the empire's loss of half of its non-Muslim population, which now constituted approximately 20% of the entire Ottoman population.⁵⁸⁹ This led Abdülhamid II to come to the conclusion that Ottomanism, as had been formulated before, was a failing policy and did not persuade non-Muslim subjects to perceive themselves as Ottomans. Therefore, it made sense for him to reformulate Ottoman identity with a stronger emphasis on its religious aspects.⁵⁹⁰ It is this shift in Hamidian policies and the redefinition of the identity of Ottoman subjects, along with general anti-colonial sentiments in the Muslim world, that are labeled as "pan-Islamism."

"Pan-Islamism" was a European fabrication and an ideological label that portrayed the Muslims as a monolithic entity, which collectively and blindly obeyed a retrograde Sultan.⁵⁹¹ The increased Muslim awareness of European colonialism took various locally inflected forms of expression which were not always in line with the respective policies of the Sultan. Despite common views about European colonialism, both the Sultan's and other Muslims' politics were devised as a response to their own local needs. However, these responses were generally interpreted as fanatical Muslim reactions to progress and European civilizations. Such themes are perpetuated even in some recent works, where it is claimed that pan-Islamism is "based, first and foremost, on the commonality of religious sentiment which one can take for granted while devoting the attention [...] to politics and economics as perceived and employed by Pan-

⁵⁸⁹ See Zürcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State," 58.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ See the insightful piece by Khalid, "Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and Its Uses." Nikki R. Keddie, "Pan-Islam as Proto-Nationalism," *The Journal of Modern History* 41, no. 1 (March, 1969). Also, Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924*, 26n.

Islam.”⁵⁹² Sean Oliver-Dee applies the term to most of Muslim history without hesitation. In his view, Muslims, at least around the 1900s, had a mentality naturally alien to the west, which did not accept the separation “between the church and the state.”⁵⁹³

There is no doubt that there were many calls for Muslim unity against European colonialism, and Abdülhamid II hoped that he could make good use of Muslims’ growing anti-colonial sentiment for his empire’s interests. He hoped that his proclaimed religious status as a caliph would give him a greater political advantage among all Muslims. However, it does not mean that even Abdülhamid II was deluded enough to think that the entire Islamic world could be turned into a single political entity to be administered under his rule, as was the case in the Umayyad era. The unity of the Muslim world aside, even all the Ottoman Muslims were not ready to follow Abdülhamid II or any other ruler blindly. All that Abdülhamid II hoped for was that all Muslims would take a unified stance against increasing European pressure. His celebratory approach to the caliphate was “... a diplomatic ploy aimed at doing unto Europeans what they were doing to the Ottoman state through their patronage of various non-Muslim *millets*.”⁵⁹⁴ Thus, the uniformity of Islam in a real sense did not exist. Such a perception of a unitary Islam was, rather, the outcome of a European attempt to define its identity in opposition to the non-European other in general and to the Muslims in particular.⁵⁹⁵ Therefore, Europe portrayed itself as one entity, while picturing the other, i.e., heterogeneous Muslim anti-colonialism, merely as the manifestation of Islam with the Ottoman caliph being its absolute

⁵⁹² Jacob Landau quoted in Khalid, “*Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and its Uses*,” 203.

⁵⁹³ Sean Oliver-Dee, *The Caliphate Question: The British Government and Islamic Governance* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 6.

⁵⁹⁴ Khalid, “*Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and its Uses*,” 205.

⁵⁹⁵ For a great discussion on Western religious discourse as a means of defining its own identity versus “the rest” see, Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*.

embodiment. However, it is clear that pan-Islamism was not a purely religious or political sentiment for Abdülhamid or other Muslims. For Abdülhamid the enterprise, as Zürcher describes, was “an ideological counteroffensive, which Poulton has likened to Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*.”⁵⁹⁶

Pan-Islamism should be seen in the context of the late 19th and early 20th centuries; and the term mostly reflects the different concerns and politics of the period, which, as Khalid puts it, were “completely at home with discourses of progress, nation and ethnicity.”⁵⁹⁷ Alongside European pressure, there were nationalists, secessionists and cultural and political challengers to Abdülhamid II’s rule. To advance their competing agendas, those challengers also took up the very same religious jargon and discourse utilized by the Sultan himself. When Turkish opposition literature is compared with Iranian reformist literature from the same era, it is clear that religion figures much more prominently in the literature of Abdülhamid II’s opponents.⁵⁹⁸ Iranian reformists also claimed that their reformist views were compatible with Islamic teachings. However, since in the Iranian context the emphasis was generally on the religious necessity of the constitution as opposed to the state’s religious monopoly, the use of religious discourse seems to be less than in the Ottoman case. In the Iranian context, reformists mostly attempted to gain the support of *Shi’i* clerics rather than challenging the state’s religious claims and interpretations, since the Qajar state was far less capable of managing religion and generally could not independently claim religious legitimacy.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁶ Zürcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State," 58.

⁵⁹⁷ Khalid, "*Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and its Uses*," 204.

⁵⁹⁸ See, for instance, the oppositional Ottoman journal *Istikbal*

⁵⁹⁹ See for example Muhammad Muhit Tabatabai, *Majmuah-I Asar-I Mirza Malkum Khan/ the Collection of Mirza Malkum Khan's Work*, Chap-i 1. ed.(Tehran: Intisharat-i ilmi, ?).

The Ottomans had already drafted a constitution that was put on hold by Sultan, a self-proclaimed religious leader of the Muslim world. His opponents thus attempted to cast doubt on his religious legitimacy for a variety of reasons. However, they primarily pointed to the Sultan's disregard for the principal of consultation, *Şura* (Ar. *Shura*), which they propagated as the essence of constitutionalism and a parliamentary system. Hence, Abdülhamid II's opponents advocated for consultation as a religious obligation for the ruler based on Qur'anic teachings and the Prophetic traditions. The Sultan's disregard for the principal of consultation was used as a powerful tool against his general disregard for the constitution.

It should thus be no great surprise that not all Muslim intellectuals in the Ottoman context were happy for their anti-colonial stances to be interpreted as a sign of their endorsement of the Sultan's pan-Islamism. Some of them were abundantly unequivocal in expressing their displeasure with respect to the mischaracterizations of their struggle. They contended that "[t]he aim of Pan-Islamism then is to liberate these three hundred millions of human beings from *any yoke whatsoever that would maintain them in a state of ignorance and degradation* [it is a struggle] against the aggressor, be he the Pope or Khalifa."⁶⁰⁰ Some non-Muslim activists and leaders clearly saw the local aspect of pan-Islamism as an anti-colonial movement. Surely it must be interpreted as such; otherwise non-Muslim leaders like Mahatma Gandhi could not show their solidarity with a "movement," if it was nothing more than a manifestation of Muslim religious solidarity.⁶⁰¹ All accounts that overlook competing claims and Muslim rivalries of the time within their greater anti-colonial politics, known as pan-Islamism, and perceive it as a sheer manifestation of religious conviction, commit the great sin of reductionism. Studies that are more

⁶⁰⁰ A Turkish Intellectual by the name of Behdjet Wahby Bey quoted in: Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*: 17.

⁶⁰¹ See, Ishtiaq Ahmad, "From Pan-Islamism to Muslim Nationalism: The Indian Muslim Response to the Turkish War of Liberation " in *International Conference Turkish War of Liberation*(Istanbul, Turkey. May 12-13, 2005).

recent show that not only the Ottomans but also the British, Germans and Bolsheviks were all entertaining the idea of *Khilafa* for certain political interests.⁶⁰²

What is called pan-Islamism in the Ottoman-Turkish context, with its statist qualifications, had roots in the pre-Hamidian era. Abdülhamid II's adamant claim to the caliphate created the grounds for intense religious criticism of his policies shortly after his accession to power. A cursory look at some of the Ottoman newspapers, such as *İstikbal*,⁶⁰³ in the late 1870s shows a very robust intellectual opposition to Abdülhamid II's rule with equally deep religious and nationalist-populist overtones, as does the publication *Şura-yi Ummat*. Of course, the Sultan's instrumental use of religion is well known. The writers of *İstikbal* posed a serious intellectual challenge to Hamidian rule on almost every ground with their sophisticated religious jargon. The newspaper not only portrays Abdülhamid II as an unfit, anti-constitutional autocrat, but also attempts to falsify his religious claims based on the same religious discursive framework that he used to discredit his opponents. *İstikbal*'s writers utilize *nas* (the Qur'an and *Hadith*), history and major canonical Islamic sources for their theological-political fight against the Hamidian regime. They contend that Abdülhamid II's caliphate was no more legitimate than that of Yezid, who murdered Husain, Muhammad's grandson.⁶⁰⁴

Generally, these arguments and the way they formulate their religious opposition to Abdülhamid II's claim to the caliphate ostensibly to appealed to the traditional *Sunni* clerics. In addition, their religious objections and arguments in part resemble some of the objections that

⁶⁰² Khalid, "Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and its Uses," 205-21. Mushirul Hasan., "Religion and Politics: The Ulama and Khilafat Movement," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 16, no. 20 (May 16, 1981). Also, Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924*.

⁶⁰³ It was published by a certain Ali Şefkati Bey in Europe. The Hamidian state was very sensitive to this paper and many times attempted to halt its publication. Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 498, Gömlek No: 57, Fon Kodu: HR.TO.. Tarih: 09/9/1880 (Miladî).; BOA: Dosya No: 818, Gömlek No: 66007, Fon Kodu: İ.DH.. Tarih: 24/Z /1297(Hicrî) [1880].; BOA: Dosya No: 165, Gömlek No: 116, Fon Kodu: Y.A...HUS. Tarih: 04/L /1297(Hicrî) [1880].

⁶⁰⁴ *İstikbal*: 15-19 (November, 18 & 24, 1880).

were raised against the Ottoman Sultan in the 16th century, such as those in Lütü Paşa's booklet on the caliphate.⁶⁰⁵

In some ways, Abdülhamid II had based his interpretation of the caliphate on Lütü Paşa's defense and redefinition of it.⁶⁰⁶ He confronted the Muslim opposition and "countered the British by reviving the sixteenth-century Ottoman argument that service to Islam, rather than Quraish descent, was most important to the legitimacy of the caliphate."⁶⁰⁷ Prevalent populism and the instrumental use of religion as the mark of the era aside,⁶⁰⁸ their argument bears witness to the unending debates over the *Khilafa* throughout Islamic history. Their challenge also reveals the fact that the *Khilafa* had become the battleground where the fight for the Sultan's legitimacy was taking place. As the Sultan's bureaucracy attempted to increase the state's religious façade, his opponents strove to show the 'profanity' of his rule. For example, *İstikbal* reports⁶⁰⁹ that the Şeyhülislam (Sheikh al-Islam) had published a booklet informing Muslims of their obligations in both Arabic and Turkish. The article indicates that the state intended to distribute the booklet in North Africa, Arabia and India. It is said that the booklet consisted of three parts: 1) a definition of Muslims' duties and their responsibilities before God; 2) an enumeration of their obligations and duties to "the shadow of God" and "the Prophet's caliph"; 3) the claim that all Muslims, no matter where they might live, are religiously obliged to obey the caliph's order for jihad against non-Muslims even if the caliph errs in his call.⁶¹⁰ The newspaper then attends to every major

⁶⁰⁵ Discussed in Chapter one.

⁶⁰⁶ Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*: 243.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 256.

⁶⁰⁸ For more on this see: *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁹ *İstikbal*: 15&19(November, 18 & 24, 1880).

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

point in the booklet in an attempt to refute them on religious grounds. Therefore, parallel with the arguments of some *Sunni* scholars, the writers of *İstikbal* a) claim that all the Islamic sources and the Prophetic traditions evidence that the true caliphate was that of *Rashidun* which lasted only for thirty years and thereafter there will only be a sultanate. b) Abdülhamid II is not even a just Sultan and has violated the principal of equality. Unlike the era of *Rashidun* when the judge could rule in favor of non-Muslims against the caliph himself, in the Hamidian regime an independent judiciary is unimaginable. c) The Sultan has violated the principal of consultation as required by the Quran. d) The Sultan has annulled the principal of enjoining good and preventing evil, which, based on Qur'anic teaching is the duty of every individual Muslim. e) In addition, since he is the appointee of the very same illegitimate Sultan, the current *Şeyhülislam* has no more religious credibility than the Sultan himself.⁶¹¹

The aim in citing these detailed examples is to point to the complexity of the political context of the Hamidian era. Undoubtedly, all the political players were aware of the importance of religion and the degrees of its instrumental use. If the understanding of a political ideology is merely based on the use or the application of slogans and jargon, then it would be impossible to make any sense of the literature produced by the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP) and other opponents of Abdülhamid II. *Şura-yi Ummat*, a CUP publication, which had as its logo a Qur'anic verse about consultation, describes the mission of the paper in its first issue as follows:

Şura-yi Ummat is the publication of an association whose goal is to bring happiness to all the Ottomans and to save them from current calamities...this association both hopes and makes its duty to *preserve the unity of the sublime Ottoman state, safeguard its political independence*, to protect it from any *type of foreign meddling in its affairs*, and to *revive its glory...to defend the rights of the Umma*, to work for the betterment of the welfare ...of the Ottomans... [the goal of this publication is] to bring unity of their views ... to unite all *Muslim and non-Muslim Ottomans* based on *their patriotic and*

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

humanistic sentiments...to bring to power those who *understand the requirements of our ages* ...⁶¹²

Save for the first word in the publication's title, *Şura*, consultation, and "the current calamities," Abdülhamid II would have endorsed the paragraph in its entirety. It contains all the popular ideas of the time such as *Umma*, Ottomanism, Islamic unity, and national unity. The paragraph, on the other hand, puts on display the conditions of a polity i.e., the Ottomans, who experience a myriad of contestations, contradictions, fears, and uncertainties that neither can be ignored nor easily resolved. However, what should not go unnoticed is the fact that religiosity is only one issue among many. Regardless of religious faith, the entire population is considered as the *Umma*. The Ottoman *Umma* is the entire Ottoman population including all non-Muslims, which the CUP tries to unify based on their sense of belonging to what was once the glorious Ottoman state. This glorious state was to be revived under truly modernist CUP leaders, who were trained and educated in the modernized education system that was itself put in place by Abdülhamid II. That is why some Ottoman scholars generally warn against espousing simplistic binaries in analyzing the complexity of Ottoman society in general or existing trends of the period such as nationalism, Ottomanism or Hamidian pan-Islamism in particular.⁶¹³

The caliphate and "universal" Muslim obedience to it was far from any reality, not just in the entire Muslim world, but even within Ottoman borders. Ottoman state-society relations were fraught with too many contradictions, challenges, conflicting policies and agendas. Abdülhamid II's rule was faced with a multitude of challenges, foreign threats and encroachments on his domain. In order to neutralize such foreign threats, Abdülhamid II sometimes had to make "unholy" alliances with those powers like Britain whose strategic goal in the region was to

⁶¹² *Şura-yi Ummat*. (No. 1; 1902)

⁶¹³ See more recent works on the late Ottoman period by the following scholars: Deringil, Karpas, Khalid, Hanioglu, Sohrabi, and Zürcher.

undermine his rule.

Abdülhamid II greatly feared the political force of the idea of an Arab caliphate and its possible 'misuse' by foreign powers like Britain. To combat the notion of an Arab caliphate and growing nationalisms, and to decrease foreign influence in the fringes of the empire, Abdülhamid II strove to spread Sufi orders that preached absolute obedience to him.⁶¹⁴ These types of activities, however, did not always produce the intended result and it was not rare that his calls for *jihad* were ignored even in places that were close to the *dar al-khilafa*, such as Central Asia.⁶¹⁵ Shortly after his accession to the throne, Abdülhamid II faced turmoil in some of the Arab lands, like Syria.⁶¹⁶ It is believed that his attempts to spread Sufi orders such as that of the Rifa'i, who eagerly advocated obedience to the Sultan, were a counter-offensive measure against growing dissatisfaction in that region. The Sultan had chosen one of his major propagandists from among the Rifa'is in Syria; there was a great amount of publicity from 1880 onward that aimed "to defuse... incipient Syrian nationalism."⁶¹⁷

In other parts of Arab lands, too, the Sultan was not perceived as a God-send or as the successor of the Prophet. One of the Sultan's greatest worries was Arab nationalism, religious and otherwise, which was forming around the discourse of an Arab caliphate.⁶¹⁸ The Wahabi

⁶¹⁴ Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*: 126-28. Also, see: Yitzhak Weismann, "The Forgotten Shaikh: 'Isā al-Kurdī and the Transformation of the Naqshbandī-Khālidi " *Die Welt des Islams, New Series* 43, no. 3 (2003).

⁶¹⁵ Qureshi, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: A Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924*: 20.

⁶¹⁶ For instance, *İstikbal* (no: 9 August, 9, 1880) reports that based on information made available by European press the Arabs in Beirut and Syria had written mocking slogans on the walls of the big mosques. These slogans pointed to the state discriminatory policies that asserted: "The Turks need us only for their wars and ignore us when there is peace." *İstikbal* also indicates that the Arabs demanded a greater autonomy (*geniş muhtariyet*). Additionally, they threatened that if the Sultan were to reject their demands they would take up arms to fight the Ottoman state and to declare a united caliphate under the leadership of the Sharif of Mecca."

⁶¹⁷ Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*: 126-28.

⁶¹⁸ Pears writes: "In the early years of Abdul Hamid, the chief mosques in Stamboul contained extracts from the Sacred Books of the qualification of required in the Caliph. About 1890, by Abdul Hamid's command, these were

defiance to Ottoman rule and their constant challenge to the legitimacy of the Ottoman caliphs had a long history. Wahhabis had no qualms in seeking foreign support, i.e. British, against the Ottomans. During the Hamidian reign the ‘*ulama* in Mecca had declared Britain as “the greatest Muslim power” and had recognized India under the British rule as *dar al-Islam*, and as such had granted British colonialism with the loyalty of the vast majority of Indian Muslims.⁶¹⁹

Muslim revivalists, too, had ambivalent feelings about the Sultan and his policies. Their ambivalence was rooted in both nationalistic and religious feelings. They had not remained unaffected by increasing nationalist and anti-colonialist sentiments. It should be obvious that the revivalists’ interpretations, like any new interpretation, were to take place under the influence of or within a simultaneously nationalist, modernist, and anti-colonial socio-political and cultural environment. Like any other interpretations, religious interpretations, rigid or flexible, contain elements of both continuity and specificity of context. A cursory reading of the works produced by religious scholars of the time leaves no doubt that their literature shows its racial and ethnic bent quite clearly. This signifies the fact that religious interpretations cannot be detached easily from their historical circumstances and socio-political contexts. As such, even ethnic influence on people’s religious interpretation may entail both continuity and context specificity.

Competing nationalist ideas of different Muslim groups were reflected in their religious expressions. The paramount example of the ascendancy of nationalistic expression in the caliphate debates was showcased in the 1926 Muslim Congress in Cairo. The congress was formed for the purpose of reviving the Islamic caliphate, and mainly took place because of Rashid Rida’s efforts. However, instead of supporting the Ottoman caliph, except for a few

ordered to be taken down, and a considerable amount of discontent was thus created amongst the Ulama...” Quoted in Zeine N. Zeine, *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism, with a Background Study of Arab-Turkish Relations in the near East*, [Rev. ed.(Beirut,: Khayats, 1966), 54n.

⁶¹⁹ Oliver-Dee, *The Caliphate Question: The British Government and Islamic Governance*: 47.

persons, “each participating delegation wanted to make its own ruler caliph.”⁶²⁰ The nationalist tendencies in revivalist literature were not limited to the influence of the idea of the nation-state and the way it informed debates over the caliphate. Without paying attention to the influence of nationalism and racial claims, there is no other way to reconcile prominent religious scholars’ - such as Rashid Rida or Bediüzzaman Said Nursi - remarks in praising their own ethnicity for possessing “distinct ethical qualities.”⁶²¹ Rida’s views were not just an instance of the outburst of racial tendencies, as summarized below by Haddad:

Arabs were more courageous, and more steadfast in adherence to Islam, Rida wrote. Unlike the Turks, who usually followed their leaders unquestioningly, Arabs were prone to political power struggles. But in Rida’s view, this fractiousness, while not promoting unity, reflected the Arabs’ closer adherence to the Islamic “democratic principle” and an independence of mind and will.⁶²²

To return to the revivalist’s relationship with the Sultan, aside from other relevant political factors, for both parties, nationalism was a dividing factor and anti-colonialism a uniting one. The overriding factor for Muslim unity, as pointed out by Mushirul Hasan, was the Sultan’s ability to defend Islamic holy places, especially Mecca and Medina, in the face of a possible European incursion. British documents also evince the fact that the Ottoman caliphate was not loved by the Muslims in India or Arabia, though its demise was seen as the end of the Muslim world as it was known to them.⁶²³ This remained a determining factor for major figures like Rida even after the dethroning of Abdülhamid II in 1909. In Rida’s view, although “the Arabs [had] supremacy in the religious sphere ... the Turks [had] supremacy in the attributes of political and

⁶²⁰ Karpát, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*: 257.

⁶²¹ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*.

⁶²² Haddad, " Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashīd Riḍā's Ideas on the Caliphate " 257.

⁶²³ FO 141/587/2, F83 quoted in: Oliver-Dee, *The Caliphate Question: The British Government and Islamic Governance*.

military power, at least since the emergence of the Ottoman Empire.”⁶²⁴ This makes clear that for Muslim figures like Rida, Muslim unity, strong or loose, was more a political expediency due to the threat of colonial presence than a strong religious sentiment that was aroused by faith.

Muslim revivalists were well aware of Abdülhamid II’s intentions and agenda and did not see them as especially religious. Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad (1889–1964) testifies to this reality and states that all the *Du‘at* (Muslim revivalists) knew the Ottoman state’s intention in employing the title of the caliphate and its instrumental use of Islam.⁶²⁵ The Arabs generally believed in an Arab caliphate. However, this did not make many avoid cooperation with the Ottomans when it came to their anti-colonial agenda. For instance, the renowned scholar Shakip Arsalan contended that the end of *Rashidun* era was also the end of the caliphate, in the true sense of the term. These views, however, did not stop him from cooperating with the Ottoman state. For all his anti-colonial tendencies, Arsalan acted almost like an Ottoman ambassador—travelling back and forth between Istanbul and European capitals.⁶²⁶

Iconic revivalist figures such as Abdurrahman al-Kawakibi, Rashid Rida and others always had deep misgivings about any non-Arab claimants of the caliphate.⁶²⁷ Al-Kawakibi wrote two very influential books: *Tabāyi‘ al-Istibdād wa Maṣāri‘ al-Isti‘bād*, which later became a regional classic against autocracy, and *Umm al-Qura*, that was almost entirely a defense of the exclusive Arab right to the caliphate. The latter is basically al-Kawakibi’s programme for the reestablishment of an Arabic caliphate.⁶²⁸ Al-Kawakibi believed that the Ottomans’ use of the

⁶²⁴ Haddad, " Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashīd Riḍā's Ideas on the Caliphate " 257.

⁶²⁵ Al-Aqqad, 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi 73.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ Cf. Rashid Khalidi, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

⁶²⁸ See; al-Kawakibi, *Um Al-Qura*, especially from p. 150 onward.

caliphate was “only a diplomatic ploy, to perpetuate their rule over their subjects with ease and to scare Europe in the name of the caliphate and Muslim public opinion.”⁶²⁹

Kawakibi was unequivocal in stating that there was no path to the revival of Islam and no actual Prophetic message other than the reestablishment of an Arab caliphate.⁶³⁰ He also believed that an Arab caliphate was the only way to Arab liberation (*falah*).⁶³¹ Thus, al-Kawakibi quotes the renowned medieval Arab poet al-Mutanabih, announcing that “people are dependents on their kings for [any achievements] and there will never be an Arab deliverance under non-Arab kings.”⁶³²

It must be indicated that al-Kawakibi’s book was very popular among Muslim Arab revivalists. It was so popular that Sami Dhahran, one of al-Kawakibi’s biographers, claims that the book was “revised either by Abduh or by Rashid Rida,” two well-known revivalist figures.⁶³³ To al-Kawakibi, Islam and the Arabs were almost inseparable. The Arabs were the only people who could have halted ‘the degeneration of Islam’ caused by the Turks and other non-Arabs. In essence,

al-Kawakibi’s defense of Islamic civilization was a glorification of Arabs in the development of that civilization. The virtues of Islam—its language, its Prophet, its early moral and political order—were Arab achievements. In his view, the decadence of Islam was caused by the practices of the Turks and other non-Arab people had introduced into the *umma*, and he went so far as to express regret that the Turks had ever embraced the faith...al-Kawakibi called for the Ottomans to relinquish their unjustified claim to the caliphate and to restore the office to its rightful possessors, the Arabs.⁶³⁴

⁶²⁹ Quoted in al-Aqqad, *‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi*., 144.

⁶³⁰ al-Kawakibi, *Um Al-Qura*, 150-51.

⁶³¹ Ibid.

⁶³² Ibid., 151.

⁶³³ Al-Aqqad, *‘Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi* 81.

⁶³⁴ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* 2nd ed.(Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), 126.

The populist rhetoric⁶³⁵ of pan-Islamism, as characterized by Karpas, was certainly “at home with nationalism,”⁶³⁶ argues Khalid. Any revivalist who believed the *imamate* to be an exclusive right of the Quraish or was for Arab independence rejected the Ottoman caliphate,⁶³⁷ at least on a theoretical level. As such, all pro-independent Arab groups and figures believed that recognizing the Ottoman caliphate amounted to giving up the caliphate as their exclusive right, and that this would render their claim to a state of their own illegitimate.⁶³⁸ This was very much in line with pan-Arabism that also aimed at forging Arab unity under an Arab caliph. Depriving the Ottoman Sultan of this religious status would have provided Arab nationalism, religious and otherwise, with legitimate grounds for Arab independence, and this tactic was used as a weapon against the Sultan. Furthermore, pan-Arabists did not see their aspiration for independence as contradictory to greater Islamic unity in any way. However, they did not want the future of their people or religion to remain tied to the future of the Ottoman state or its policies.⁶³⁹ These examples not only demonstrate an extraordinarily complex situation but also render any attempt to detach these institutions, movements and socio-political and religious claims from their historical contexts and loci very problematic.

Any attempt to characterize even the revivalist movements of the time as unaffected by nationalist tendencies falls into the trap of essentialism. As indicated earlier,⁶⁴⁰ from its inception, lineage and some elements of ethnocentrism remained persistent in the debate over the

⁶³⁵ See, Karpas, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*.

⁶³⁶ See, Khalid, "Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and its Uses."

⁶³⁷ Al-Aqqad, 'Abd Al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi 75.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ See, chapter two, in the present study.

caliphate and therefore it was far from being a purely theological debate. The debate over the caliphate, especially following the murder of the third caliph, reflects socio-political conflicts and rivalries more than anything else. Muhammad Iqbal's assertions illustrate this historical chasm and the gulf between the ruler's claim to legitimacy and the collective consensus of Muslim scholars. According to Iqbal, the political environment was rarely, if ever, hospitable to independent collective juridical endeavors.⁶⁴¹ However, the disparate and contradictory nature of the debate reveals the ethnic political interest of its participants as much as their religiosity.

When it comes to recent Ottoman history and the relationship between the caliph and Muslim subjects, the label pan-Islamism does not reflect the way Muslims viewed Abdülhamid II. Nor does the Sultan's unyielding urge for recognition as caliph illustrate some type of decontextualized understanding of Islam. Abdülhamid strove to universalize Turkish cultural markers within Islamic discourse. As shown, through his Turkification policies he mobilized almost the entire state apparatus to create a totalizing discourse, since "a hegemonic tantalization requires a radical investment."⁶⁴²

It should be noted that in modern times, greater emphasis on the state religious identity was not unique to Muslim rulers or to Abdülhamid II, for this matter. Nor was it an unfamiliar phenomenon in Christendom. Emperor Francis-Joseph II of Austria and Tsars Alexander III and Nicolas II and Queen Victoria in Britain had all posed as defenders of their faith and Christianity in one way or another.⁶⁴³

Abdülhamid II seems to have adopted a different policy from his predecessors, i.e. pan-

⁶⁴¹ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Batu Caves, Selangor Darul Ehsan: Masterpiece, 2006).

⁶⁴² Laclau, *On Populist Reason*: 71.

⁶⁴³ Zürcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State," 59.

Islamism. However, if his political priorities are ignored, in essence the new policies of Abdülhamid appear to be largely congruent with Ottomanism. Ottomanism, however, was supposed to be about religious equality,⁶⁴⁴ which hardly went beyond a pretentious claim.⁶⁴⁵ Many modernizing policies continued with full force: “In 1879, there was a whole reorganization of the judicial system by the creation of a Ministry of Justice [that] was based on French jurisprudence.”⁶⁴⁶ Abdülhamid II also adopted a profoundly modern education policy.⁶⁴⁷ It is said that “the Hamidian period was a complex and inventive reaction to the blind Westernism of the *Tanzimat*.”⁶⁴⁸

Leading scholars of Ottoman history generally concur on the fact that, as opposed to previous, superficial adoptions of Westernism, Abdülhamid II’s policies were more in line with those of the Young Ottomans and should be seen as “an alternative vision of modernity that was emerging at this time.”⁶⁴⁹ Modernization policies followed, especially in the fields of education, infrastructure and state bureaucracy. Overall, however, “Pan-Islamism” was a response to long lasting internal and external problems.⁶⁵⁰ It is commonly held that there is a great deal of similarity between the Hamidian period and the reign of Selim III and Mahmud II (1789-1839) and the *Tanzimat* reforms (1839-1876); these periods are characterized by attempts to unify and

⁶⁴⁴ Ussama Makdisi, "After 1860: Debating Religion, Reform, and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 4 (Nov., 2002): 606.

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. BOA: Dosya No:1015, Gömlek No: 70, Fon Kodu: MVL Tarih: 23/S /1282 (Hicrî) [16.07.1865].

⁶⁴⁶ Zeine, *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism, With a Background Study of Arab-Turkish Relations in the Near East*: 27.

⁶⁴⁷ Cf. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire*.

⁶⁴⁸ Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, 1902-1910*: 47.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Karpat, *Studies on Turkish Politics and Society: Selected Articles and Essays*: 204. Also, Zürcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State," 57.

centralize the state. These periods are known for the state's struggle to create "legal-rational norms along Western lines, yet they are differentiated by degrees of intensity and styles through selective borrowing from more successful rivals."⁶⁵¹

As previously shown,⁶⁵² Abdülhamid II's policies in the areas of language instruction, education, and bureaucracy were becoming increasingly Turkified. Notwithstanding the intensity, the succeeding regime's Turkification policies were more evolved and represented the culmination of the Hamidian regime's policies. The Hamidian era is seen as the matrix of the manifestation of Turkish nationalism in all its later forms. Therefore, the Kemalist narrative of a break with the recent Ottoman past has been criticized in recent studies by major Ottomanist historians.⁶⁵³ They contend that Hamidian pan-Islamism was not merely a religious doctrine, nor did the Kemalist state a complete abandonment of that era's socio-political and religious legacy. More importantly, Kemalist statism, in some important ways, is viewed as a continuation of those policies, ideas and reforms. In other words, "... without [Hamidian] improvements the political developments of the Young Turks era and the Republic would have been rather unthinkable."⁶⁵⁴

Abdülhamid's legacy was not limited to the above-mentioned reforms that were followed by later generations of Turkish political leaders, with varying speed. One of his legacies was their adoption of the policy of combating 'tribalism' by 'civilizing' their sons and introducing them to the modern sciences and the 'true Islam'. In 1892, a year after introducing Hamidiye

⁶⁵¹ Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, 1902-1910*: 32.

⁶⁵² See, section two of the present chapter.

⁶⁵³ Cf. Deringil, *The Well-protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909*. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the late Ottoman Empire*. Erik-Jan Zürcher. *The Importance of Being Secular*. in Kerem Öktem and Philip Robins(Ed). *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity; Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*. (Palgrave. New York. 2010)

⁶⁵⁴ Karpas, *Studies on Turkish Politics and Society: Selected Articles and Essays*: 204.

Cavalries,⁶⁵⁵ which was aimed at making Kurdish tribes dependent on the state and preparing them for any possible conflicts with Armenians, the state opened tribal schools (*Aşiret Mektepleri*). The sons of disobedient tribes,⁶⁵⁶ who were famed for their lack of loyalty, rebelliousness and refusal to pay taxes, would be brought to those schools to be educated and to become better subjects.⁶⁵⁷ Among other things, the students at the school would have learned “to pray together and express their submission to Allah, the Prophet, and *the Sultan’s guidance*,⁶⁵⁸ ‘so that they would abstain from falsehood.’”⁶⁵⁹

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Hamidian legacy was what Erik Zürcher calls the state’s “religious management.”⁶⁶⁰ Karpát finds the genesis of this policy in the *Tanzimat* and describes it as the end of the traditional religion/state separation.⁶⁶¹ It is hard to agree with Karpát’s characterizations—the traditional religion/state separation—since the two had probably never been separated, at least from the perspective of the state.⁶⁶² However, Karpát’s claim is not entirely invalid in the sense that the nature of state dealings with Islam was transformed

⁶⁵⁵ For a detailed study of Hamidiya Cavalries and their political significance see, Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁵⁶ The tribal school was for Arabs, Albanians, and Kurds.

⁶⁵⁷ For more on tribal schools see; Alişan Akpınar and Eugene L. Rogan, *Aşiret, Mektep, Devlet: Osmanlı Devletinde Aşiret Mektebi* (Istanbul: Aram Yayincılık, 2001).

⁶⁵⁸ Emphasis added.

⁶⁵⁹ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*: 48.

⁶⁶⁰ See Zürcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State."

⁶⁶¹ Karpát, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*: 9.

⁶⁶² A brief look at the distant history of governing practice, such the Abbasid rule, emphasize that interference by rulers on the direction of religious scholarship occurred. Some canonical works produced under the auspices of the rulers. *Al-Muwatta* (a *Hadith* and *fihi* book) by Malik, the head of the Maliki School of jurisprudence, and *al-Kharaj* (a *fihi* book) by Abu Yusuf, just to name a few. This situation, exemplifies the impact of “the political” authority on the religious knowledge production. There have been times during which the noted Muslim scholars such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the head of Hanbali School, could not undertake his scholarly endeavors independently without risking his dignity.

dramatically. It was in the *Tanzimat* era that the state started to regulate religiosity as opposed to the earlier eras in which the state's regulation of the religion lacked the same sophistication.

In Abdülhamid II's period, this process of regulating Islam was intensified by the Sultan's struggle to restore the caliphate as a form of a religious Leviathan that would increasingly centralize Islam along the state lines and reintroduce a dual Turkish and state-sanctioned Islamic identity. In Abdülhamid's era, the state became the sole source of "true religiosity." From Abdülhamid's reign onward the Ottoman/Turkish state reserved for itself the exclusive right of determining correct Islam, as opposed to a false Islam, or *Irtica*, any form of religiosity or religious interpretations that strayed from officially sanctioned religiosity. The Hamidian policy of managing religiosity and religious interpretations continued to be the state's practice long after of the creation of the supposedly 'militant secularist state' in 1924.⁶⁶³ The Hamidian regime turned Islam into a political battleground that forced the opposition to contest it within the framework of its own discursive parameters. Ironically, Abdülhamid's rule was ended with significant support from Ottoman clerics. On April 15, 1909, even before the Liberals changed their stance, the higher-ranking clerics in public declarations stated ... the constitution's compatibility with *şeriat* beyond a shred of doubt, going so far as to call its defense a religious duty. Furthermore, by recounting the religious book burning at the Gülhane Park during the despotic period, they highlighted their hostility toward the Palace.⁶⁶⁴

This further evidences the complexity of the Hamidian period. Despite the pervasiveness of religious discourse and competing claims to religious legitimacy, religion was not and could not become the sole determining factor in state/subject relations. Even the concept of the unity of

⁶⁶³ For more on Ottoman/Turkish state religious management see, Zürcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State."

⁶⁶⁴ Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran, 1902-1910*: 305.

Islam was ‘a condition of difference’ since the Ottomans did not see every Muslim group or country as being civilized enough to be a part of this unity.

As indicated from the outset, pan-Islamism was a term coined by Europeans. The unity of Islam (*İttihadi İslam*) advocated by Muslims, including the Hamidian regime, was not equivalent to pan-Islamism. It never lost its local characteristics and was probably never understood by all Muslims as meaning the same thing. As far as its Hamidian version is concerned, it mostly remained nationalistic. It gave a central role to state interests, and interestingly enough, bore all the marks of the Ottoman Orientalism. The Ottoman elite’s view of Iranians highlights this attitude and their selective “pan-Islamism.” Not only did the Ottomans have laws banning Ottoman women from marrying Iranian men,⁶⁶⁵ Iran as a state too was seen as unqualified to be part of Islamic unity. This becomes evident in an article titled “The Unity of Islam” (*İttihadi İslam*), published in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* in 1880. The article is a response to a piece that had been written earlier by an Iranian that stressed the need for unity between the two Muslim states. Despite the fact that the writer concurred with his Iranian interlocutor on the strategic importance of this unity, he did not see Iran as qualified to be a part of it.⁶⁶⁶ One might naturally expect the *Shi‘i* religion to be a major impediment to the unity between the two states. However, the article does not even touch upon this issue. Instead, Iranian hatred for Turkmen and Turks (*tayfey-i Atrak*) on the one hand, and Turkish reaction to this hatred on the other, are regarded as the major obstacles to a possible unity.⁶⁶⁷ It is worth noting that the Ottoman refers to his interlocutor

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 1395, Gömlek No: 126 Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 03/Ca/1304 (Hicrî) [1887]; Also, BOA : Dosya No: 34 Gömlek No: 39 Fon Kodu: Y..MTV. Tarih: 22/Za/1305/(Hicrî) [1888].; And BOA: Dosya No:14 Gömlek No: 16 Fon Kodu: MV. Tarih: 11/S /1304/(Hicrî) [1886].

⁶⁶⁶ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. No: 595 (Jun 7, 1880).

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

somewhat contemptuously as the “Asian individual” (*Asiali zat*).⁶⁶⁸ This again reflects the Ottoman elite’s orientalist attitudes towards Muslim others, which become increasingly apparent as the article enumerates reasons for the impossibility of unity between the two states.

The centrality of Istanbul’s role in civilizing and enlightening the rest of the Islamic world is seen as a condition for this unity, since Istanbul was perceived to be the carrier of modern civilization. Istanbul was no longer under the influence of the old Asian civilization (*Asya’nın Medeniyeti kedimesi*).⁶⁶⁹ The writer states that Nasser al-Din Shah’s recent visit to Europe was part of his outstanding achievements (*neticey-ı semeratı berguzide*) in recognizing the significance of modernity (*teceddiüd*). However, the idea of modernity had yet to gain popularity (*henüz te’emum etmemişter*) in Iran.⁶⁷⁰ This imagined distance of Iran from modernity is the major hindrance to an Islamic unity with the Ottomans. However, the writer did not believe that Iran was capable of stepping onto the path of modernity independently, a requirement for an Islamic unity with the Ottomans.⁶⁷¹ Then, “perhaps in order to arrive at the stage where it could serve the unity of Islam, yet again, Iran has to receive an array of light from the enlightenment in the Dersaadet (Istanbul).”⁶⁷² The writer’s overall assessment of Iran’s degree of modernity leads him to conclude that Iran is not ready for service to the unity of Islam and it is therefore too soon to impose such a unity on Iran.⁶⁷³

If we free ourselves from essentialist approaches to religion, we could be open to the idea

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid.

⁶⁷² Ibid. (*Belki İttihad-ı İslam’e istidad mevkisinin yardımıyla hizmet etmesi lazım gelen İran’ın bu istidadı yine Dersaadet’den aksettirilecek olan bir nur ile tenvir etmesine mütevakkıf olur*).

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

that religious concepts too can function as empty signifiers,⁶⁷⁴ especially when religion becomes a hegemonic identity. As Laclau has shown, “the hegemonic identity becomes something of the order of an empty signifier.”⁶⁷⁵ This is how religion can be an instrument of governmentality, a legitimizing tool in the hands of the Hamidian state, to justify its civilizing mission in the periphery and accommodate its official nationalism and orientalism. The Sultan used his religious status as a caliph to further his project of Turkifying the language, education, and the state bureaucracy. Simultaneously, opposing nationalist groups could interpret the same religion both as a unifying factor against Western colonialism and as a weapon at their disposal against a religious autocrat such as Abdülhamid II.

⁶⁷⁴ See, Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam*.

⁶⁷⁵ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*: 71.

Chapter 5

The Kurds and “Crafting of the National Selves”⁶⁷⁶

Having discussed the Hamidian state’s religious discourse as both a condition of totality and that of difference among the Muslims, we shall now turn our attention to the Kurdish case in the 19th century to see how this difference plays out. Contrary to somewhat commonly expected view,⁶⁷⁷ I argue that Islam was not a deterring factor for the Muslims’ ethno-nationalist self-consciousness. As shown in the previous chapter, those views denying Muslims’ ethno-nationalism in the pre-WWI period are not congruent with what can be gathered from the state’s archival documents, Ottoman journals, papers, and other available literature. For instance, in the late 1860s Frederick Millingen writes that he could “affirm, without fear of exaggerating, that the sentiment of nationality and the love of independence are as deeply rooted in the heart of the Koords as in that of any other nation.”⁶⁷⁸ He contends that his conclusion is based on his “personal experience, having been thrown into contact with many of the chiefs of the Koordish national movements.”⁶⁷⁹

Without forsaking their Muslim identity and beliefs, Turks and non-Turks could see themselves as having distinct identities while the Hamidian regime increasingly tried to suppress

This is phrased is borrowed from Christopher Houston, *Kurdistan: Crafting of National Selves*(Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2008).

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. Akçam, *From Empire to Republic : Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*; Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*(Montreal,: McGill University Press, 1964); Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*; Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*.

⁶⁷⁸ Osman Seifi/ Frederick Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*(London: Hurst and Blackett, 1870), 213.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

those of the non-Turks as they were seen as a threat to the state's integrity. The Kurdish uprising in 1880, discussed in the following chapter, reveals the existence of Islamic self-consciousness alongside the Kurdish ethno-nationalist aspiration. The intersection of Islam and nationalism becomes apparent in the documents produced by both lay intellectuals and by Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nehri, the leader of the uprising.⁶⁸⁰ The current chapter shall be devoted to the investigation of the religious nationalist discourse of the 19th century by analyzing a number of articles written by the Kurds about the Kurds, that were published in the Ottoman newspapers. In this way, this chapter puts those articles in their historical context. This shall be done by way of exploring the contemporary Kurdish intellectuals' journal articles published in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*⁶⁸¹ in 1880. This literature, which has not received any attention in the relevant scholarship, can provide us with a rare window into the contemporary Kurdish elite's self-perception and the socio-political context of Sheikh Ubeydullah's revolt (discussed in the next chapter).

The Rise of Rival Nationalisms

It should be kept in mind that the Hamidian state's renewed interest in the institution of the caliphate points to the fact that this regime endeavored to offset the growing non-Turkish Muslim nationalist tendencies after the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877–78. This war and the ensuing Berlin Treaty, as Karpat notes, “constituted the most important historical, cultural, and psychological watershed in the history of the Ottoman Empire. For the first time, both Ottoman statesmen and the public realized that the total collapse of the Ottoman state was an imminent

⁶⁸⁰ His case to be discussed in the following chapter.

⁶⁸¹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, was a daily newspaper published in Istanbul from 1878 to 1921.

possibility.”⁶⁸² Like other segments of Ottoman society, the Kurds too were more or less certain that the Empire would collapse and would mostly likely be divided between Britain and Russia.⁶⁸³ This consciousness of the Empire’s imminent demise was gaining currency both during and after the War. On top of this, Kurdish-Turkish interaction had left a very negative impression⁶⁸⁴ on the Kurds. The War had tremendously impacted communal and local relations, since during the War these communities had taken sides along religious lines. In the course of the two-year war between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, these divisions and communal rifts “worsened with the tsar’s issuing a proclamation extending protection to all Christians from Ottoman attacks and enjoining them to join the Russian army. At the same time, the Ottoman state also armed its constituencies on both sides of the border.”⁶⁸⁵ The War’s effect was far-reaching and left a distinctive legacy in the borderland in terms of the “rise in the nationalist and sectarian sentiments.”⁶⁸⁶

After the War, the Ottoman domains in general and the Armenian/Kurdish regions in particular were becoming increasingly fragmented. These communal rifts and their loss of faith in the sustainability of the Empire made room for Kurdish nationalist tendencies to come to light, which was simultaneously a response to both Armenian nationalism and to the Ottoman and

⁶⁸² Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*, Studies in Middle Eastern History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 153.

⁶⁸³ FO 195 / 1316:No. 24 Political (Confidential) Clayton to Trotter:

Raschid Bey [the Kaimakam of Shaddakh] was one of those sent [to Istanbul] and on his return he told the Sheikh [Ubeydullah] that the Turkish Empire was in a dying state and would be divided between the European Powers especially England and Russia, and advised him to strike for independence.

⁶⁸⁴ See: Nehri, *Tuhfetul Ehab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri*, 107-37.

⁶⁸⁵ Sabri Ateş, "Empires at the Margins: Toward the History of the Ottoman-Iranian Borderland Peoples, 1843-1881" (PhD dissertation, New York University, 2006), 300.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 297.

Qajar states' increasing pressure. Hence it was against this overall background that Abdülhamid attempted to revive the caliphate. Therefore, the Hamidian regime's post-War revival of the institution of the caliphate was as much a response to the Muslims' loss of faith in the Empire's viability as it was to the loss of the major portion of its non-Muslim population.

When it comes to the Armenian/ Kurdish regions of the Empire, there was a very complex trilogical relationship among the states, the Kurds, and the Armenians. Neither the Armenians nor the Kurds should be perceived as having been completely unified entities or that they were clearly distinct from one another everywhere or all the time. Simultaneously, at some levels, their religious differences, as there existed during the War, could affect their greater translocal loyalties. Nonetheless, their respective active groups, notables and influential figures were trying to find a way out of these post-War uncertainties and hoping to utilize this situation for the creation of a new state that could be congruent with their own ethnic rule. Therefore, although at the local level both the Kurds and the Armenians were trying win over the other side,⁶⁸⁷ when it came to the portrayal of their relations with each other in the international arena,

⁶⁸⁷ For instance, on May 9, 1880, "Armenians of the Great House of Akhtamar by the grace of God, greeting and abundant heavenly blessings to Capt. Clayton and our beloved friend the Vice Consul of the powerful English government at Van." And stating that

it is well known how the rapacious and barbarous Kurds have *plundered and destroyed this country* and that last year the Turkish Government was advised *by the great Christian powers* to send *Commissioners to Armenia* in order to save the poor and defenseless *Christians from the jaws of their cruel oppressors* and to ameliorate their painful condition. (FO 195 / 1315; emphasis added)

At the same time, as the following document demonstrates, there were various attempts for a united political front against both the Ottoman and Qajar states for instance:

For a long time *I discredited all together the idea of a Kurdo-Armenian alliance*. It seemed to me preposterous that there should *be any harmony between two races apparently so antagonistic*, but it appears that *negotiations under the pretext of trade are at this moment being carried on with the Dersim Kurds, and also with a powerful Chief in the neighborhood...* while for more than a month past relations have been entered into with Sheikh Obeydullah...*I am also informed that some Kurdish tribes of Armenian origin are not only ready to assist in any enterprise but wish to embrace the Christian faith*. (FO 195 / 1316; William Everett Capt; June 25th, 1880; Erzeroum; emphasis added)

their stories were different. Neither Armenians nor the Ottoman nor the European Powers considered the Kurds anything more than half-savage tribes who mostly indulged in banditry. The Ottoman newspapers' contemporary references to the Kurds as beasts — the appellation “*Kuyruklu Kürtler*,” literally meaning “the tailed Kurds” testifies to this reality.⁶⁸⁸ The Armenian nationalists could not see the Kurds in a brighter light either. To them, the Kurds' existence as a political collectivity was a fairy tale being narrated by the British and the Ottoman officials and therefore,

writing in the aftermath of the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78, Raffi⁶⁸⁹, one of the most influential early Armenian nationalist thinkers, argued that if ‘the unity of the Kurds’ (*Krdakan miwutyune*) was anything it was simply either a ‘dream’ of Ottoman officials in Istanbul or an ‘imaginary’ construct of the British consuls both parties of which, according to him simply, manipulated the Kurdish cultural virtues and coined out the term Kurdistan for political purposes.⁶⁹⁰

Also, there were many attempt made by both communities to win over the other side. For example, “*the Sheikh has sent to Mar Shimoun to urge him to join against the Turkish Government and has made the same request to the chief Armenian ecclesiastic here, saying that he would protect the Christians.* (FO 195 / 1315/ No. 23 Political [Confidential]; Clayton to Trotter; Bashkala, 11th July 1880; emphasis added) Or

My informant tells me that Sheikh Obeyhullah is working hard to extend his influence. *He is ingratiating himself with the Christians and large numbers of the latter have migrated from Gevver into the Sheikh's immediate neighborhood in order to enjoy his protection from other Kurds* (FO 195 / 1315, No. 20; Clayton to Trotter; Van, 25th May 1880; emphasis added)

⁶⁸⁸ A Qajar diplomat, in a Persian letter to the Ottoman Journal, *Vakit* (No: 1776; Sep. 28, 1880), warns Turkish journalists against their excessive use of the phrase, “the Kurds with tails.” The diplomat indicates that particularly after the 1878 Berlin Treaty, Turkish newspapers frequently referred to the Kurd as ‘the people with tails’ i.e., savage or beast. So, in a jocular manner the diplomat writes: *Kord Haman beh ke domash nabashad* (the Kurds are better to remain tailless).”

⁶⁸⁹ Yektan Turkyilmaz describes Raffi as (Hakob Melik-Hakobyan, 1835-1888) is one of the most influential ideologues of pan-Armenian nationalism. He was born in Salmas (Northwestern Iran) into a middle-class Iranian-Armenian family. He paid special attention to the conditions of the Armenians of Eastern Anatolia. He travelled across the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the late 1850s. He was a columnist for the prominent Armenian daily *Mshak* (Tbilisi). He wrote extensively, both fiction and non-fiction, on Armenian identity. See, Yektan Turkyilmaz, "The Problem of 'True' Kurdish Identity in Armenian Nationalist Literature, 1878-1914," in *The Middle East Studies Association (MESA)*(Marriott Copley Palace, Boston, MA November 21-24, 2009).

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

Criticizing an Ottoman paper for its pro-Kurdish stance, another intellectual by the name of Tanil Baghdasarov writes, “imagine what might become of the readers of a journalist who tries to prove that the savage, murderous, subhuman (*insanların ednası*), and barbaric Kurds are greater in number than the Armenian nation.”⁶⁹¹

While in 1880s Armenian nationalists excoriated the British Consul for creating a phantom-like entity by the name of Kurdistan, the British archives considered the Armenian nationalists as those they could rely on for obtaining accurate information about the reality on the ground. In one of these documents, the Armenians are divided into three categories: peasants, bureaucrats who work for the Ottoman state and the nationalists who strove to create an Armenian state. The latter were referred as those whose “ideas represent those of the country, and it is to them we must turn if we would learn what is going on.”⁶⁹² This illustrates the degree of the Armenian nationalists’ influence on the British officials and missionaries when it came to their view on the Kurds and the people in that region.⁶⁹³

Non-local Kurdish and Armenian actors become stridently vocal in their mutual opposition as the Great Powers established a commission called the Kurdistan Commission to implement Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin.⁶⁹⁴ Armenians and Kurds alike were hoping that

⁶⁹¹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. No: 677 (Sep. 14, 1980).

⁶⁹² FO 195 / 1316. William Everett Capt. No. 6 C. Erzeroum, June 25th, 1880

⁶⁹³ Ibid:

But the third class which consists of the more educated Gregorian Armenians either men of family and influence long resident in the country, or else men of talent and energy imported from Constantinople are a very different character. *From motives either of patriotism or ambition they have the firm intention to deliver their countrymen from their oppressors and will go any lengths to accomplish it.* They are in constant communication with the Committee at Constantinople from whom they receive their orders which are passed on to the subcommittee in the districts. Being also the men by whom the first class mentioned above are guided like sheep, their ideas represent those of the country, *and it is to them we must turn if we would learn what is going on.* (emphasis added)

⁶⁹⁴ The Article 61 in the Treaty of Berlin reads as follows:

they could use the post-war situation for the creation of their respective independent states. It seems, however, that both parties saw a green light and a possible support from the Great Powers as vital to the eventual realization of their political aspirations. Consequently, the Armenians were particularly disappointed and infuriated to hear that not only the commission's name, but also the newly opened British consul in the region bore the name of Kurdistan. In the eyes of the Armenians, this was a tacit recognition of the Kurds and the Kurdishness of the land. They “grumbled at the conduct of the British Government which had trampled on the feelings of all Armenians by nominating a Consul to Kurdistan.”⁶⁹⁵ Apparently the Armenians preferred to refer to it as the commission to Armenia.⁶⁹⁶ The naming of the area became a major point of contestation between these communities, which paved the way for the expression of Kurdish reactions in Ottoman newspapers in 1880.

Similar reactions were reflected in a number of different articles, all written by different Kurdish individuals, in the Ottoman papers.⁶⁹⁷ Since these reactions offer some rare texts that were written in that period by Kurds themselves, they help us to make some sense of how the

The Sublime Porte engages to realize without further delay, the ameliorations and the reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Kurds and the Circassians. The Sublime Porte will periodically render accounts of the measures taken with this intent to the Powers who will supervise them.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid. Cooper to Layard. No. 1; Adana, 7 January 1880.

⁶⁹⁶ “Armenians of the Great House of Akhtamar for instance writes that “the Turkish Government was advised by the great Christian powers to send *Commissioners to Armenia* in order to save the poor and defenseless...” (FO 195 / 1315; emphasis added)

Also, see *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* (No: 586; May 28, 1980).

⁶⁹⁷ Cf. Ibid. No: 585-598 (1880). Number 598 of *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* contains two important things: a) Abdulhamid's decree to proclaim the replacement of the Grand Vizier, Sa'd Paşa, in June 10, 1880. And b) the second part of an article is titled “Kurdistan or Armenistan?” seems to be the last article written by a Kurd about Kurdish-Armenian relations published by the paper, in 1880. The ensuing issues of the newspaper and Abdulhamid's decree implied that the Ottomans had received assurances that the empire's territorial integrity will remain intact. This was indicative that *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* would stop publishing pro-Kurdish articles.

Kurdish intelligentsia perceived themselves and others. Their writings either point to the existence of Kurdish nationalism or they have to be treated as “anomalies and counterinstances [and] deviations from a set of expectations, those expectations are embodied in [a] paradigm,”⁶⁹⁸ which is generally regarded as ‘Kurdish tribalism.’

Ottoman newspapers in 1880⁶⁹⁹ reveal an astonishing degree of ethnic and nationalistic tensions. One could claim that Kurdish nationalism, which was supposed to be most latent in the region, was already on display.⁷⁰⁰ Probably for the first time, some pro-Kurdish articles, written by individual Kurdish intellectuals, appeared in the Ottoman paper. This was indicative of the precarious situation in which the ruling nation found itself. While they were alarmed by the prospect of an independent Armenia and the disintegration of the Empire as a possible outcome of the Berlin Treaty, Ottoman elites such as those of the circle around *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* gave some voice to the Kurds, who were still called beasts or “tailed Kurds”⁷⁰¹ in other Ottoman papers.⁷⁰² Despite their temporarily allowing the publication of some pro-Kurdish articles, the following paragraph establishes the Turkish intellectuals’ halfhearted-ness in their apparent pro-Kurdish stance where they declare “our friends [in] Curia Durian”⁷⁰³ [are] with those who label the Kurds communally (*umumen haydut*) as brigands. Yet, *it even paints Tercüman-ı Hakikat as*

⁶⁹⁸ Here I am using Rust’s idea in different context. See: Joshua Rust, *John Searle and the Construction of Social Reality*, Continuum studies in American philosophy (London; New York: Continuum, 2006), 83.

⁶⁹⁹ Cf. *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* especially no: 586 -598, 1880

⁷⁰⁰ See *ibid.*

⁷⁰¹ Or “*Caudate Kurds*”.

⁷⁰² For instance, while *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* permits these Kurds to publish some articles, *Cerîde-i Havâdis*, in its issue no. 4328, 1880, still refers to the Kurds as Caudate Kurds (*Kuyruklu Kürtler*). See: Also, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 596; June 8, 1880).

⁷⁰³ It can be inferred that this was a pro-Armenian paper..

*pro-Kurdish*⁷⁰⁴ and this is how it whimsically brands [our newspaper].⁷⁰⁵

As much as this paragraph points to the communal contestations, ethnic consciousness, and the Ottoman elites' respective political stances, it also reveals the elite's perception of the hierarchized other. In reading this paragraph, one can easily discern that the Kurds are favored over the Armenians, but not to a degree that the Ottoman /Turkish elite wish to be identified with the Kurds. Even if against the Armenians, the Kurds' religion is still a type of bond between the two, Kurdish ethnicity and their distance from the center represent an unbreachable gulf. Therefore, the writers of *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* seem disturbed to be identified as pro-Kurds as much as they are by the Armenian claims that represent a clear threat to the official nationalism. Although people from the periphery could count as fellow Muslims against non-Muslims, the Ottoman elites could not tolerate the idea of being reduced to their level since they saw them as backwards and savages or in Karen Horney's phrasing, appeared as their own "despised image."⁷⁰⁶ Interestingly enough, people from the periphery, including the Kurds, saw the Turks as fellow Muslims in the fight against non-Muslims, but at the same time as oppressive Turks who were imposing their rule on the rest.⁷⁰⁷

Kurdish intellectuals reacted to Armenian nationalism as they viewed it as a threat to their own nationalism or to the interests of the Ottoman Kurds in general.⁷⁰⁸ Neither did they

⁷⁰⁴ In the original text, it is "their supporter" but for the sake of clarity of the sentence, I have used the proper noun, the Kurds, since the overuse of equivalent pronouns can be confusing.

⁷⁰⁵ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. No: 590 (Jun 1, 1980). (Emphasis added)

⁷⁰⁶ Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1945).

⁷⁰⁷ Cf. Nehri, *Mesnewi Şeyx Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehabab*. Also see; (FO 195 / 1315; No. 37; Trotter to Groschen; Van, 20th August 1880) in which stated that because of "the general mal-administration and failure of justice, Mussulmans who are not immediately interested parties are nearly as loud in their invectives against the government officials... as the Christians."

⁷⁰⁸ It should be kept in mind that the Ottoman state was active in pitting one community against the other; especially the Kurds against the Armenians (cf. Wadie Jwaideh. 2006). The Ottoman state tried to confront the Armenian

conceal their agitation at Ottoman elites' portrayal of the Kurds as brigands or savages. As tension grew over the implementation of the Treaty of Berlin, Ottoman papers, particularly *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, decided to make some allowance for the expression of individual Kurds' views. These debates, which reflected the Kurds' anxiety, began to appear in the Ottoman press as the possibility of the implementation of Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty increased. The Kurds seem to have perceived the reforms stipulated in Article 61 as a foreign platform for the creation of a potential Armenian state at the expense of obscuring the name of Kurdistan.⁷⁰⁹ A Kurdish notable gave voice to this fear among the Kurds when he stated that “even the most savage nations (Turkish: *akvam*; sing. *kavim*) in the world do not oppose reform. However, if these so-called reforms are going to be similar to those in Eastern Rumelia,” and result in mass killings of local Muslims, then “the Kurds will categorically reject them.”⁷¹⁰ He goes on to say that Kurds will follow their leaders and collectively fight against such impositions.⁷¹¹ It is claimed in another article that Armenians were defining their desired reforms so as to enable the creation of

nationalism by agitating the Kurds against them to make the implementation of the article 61 in Berlin treaty unfeasible. Based on the same strategy of divide and conquer, the Ottoman state was trying to pit Armenian against the Kurds, especially when it saw the rise of Sheikh Ubeydullah and local Armenian gravitation toward him. For instance, Clayton writes to Trotter the Governor of Van had told that Sheikh had a “*plan for exterminating the Christians.*” Also, he state the Turkish officials hired foreign mercenaries to incite Armenians against the Kurds. (Emphasis added; FO 195 / 1315. No. 46; Clayton to Trotter; Van 27th November 1880).

⁷⁰⁹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 586, (May 28, 1980). Also, Clayton writes to Trotter :

I may mention that everywhere I went I found a very strong feeling among the Moslems with respect to the rumors flying about that Europe intends to establish an independent Armenia. *I was continually asked whether the report was true, and the argument was more than once used to me, that it would be very much against English interests that such a state should be formed, as it would be entirely under the control of Russia.* Although the country is in an excited state; the Armenians and Nestorians talk about independence, and the Moslems are irritated against the Christians. I have heard, but cannot vouch for the truth of the report, that the Mussulmans of Van have sent to Sheikh Obeydullah to ask what they should do in view of the pretensions of the Armenians, promising to obey any orders that he might give. (emphasis added; FO 195 / 1315 (No. 25 Political; Van: 10th August, 1880)

⁷¹⁰ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 586, (May 28, 1980).

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

an Armenistan. “In the final analysis,” the writer claims, that the Armenians assert “here is Armenistan and the Kurds have no place on this land; you either have to migrate to Iran or become our subjects ... Is this a justifiable thing? Can a nation for the sake of its own survival threaten another’s existence?”⁷¹²

These fears and contentious views were also manifested in the rereading of histories and redrawing of imaginary geographical boundaries by both sides in accordance with the naming or renaming of the land.⁷¹³ The debate over whether the proper name of the land should be Kurdistan or Armenistan culminated in communal clashes followed by the state’s prohibition of the use of either of these names in Bitlis in 1881.⁷¹⁴

These articles are sometimes equally critical of the portrayal of Kurds in the Ottoman, Armenian and European press and manifest the Kurdish intellectuals’ projection of the same negative views about them onto their neighbors—the Armenians. According to the first article, pro-Armenian papers had declared that the Kurds opposed the Reforms stipulated in the Article 61, because, in the event of its implementation, the Kurds would no longer be able to use their only talent (*san‘at*)—looting and robbing Armenians.⁷¹⁵ The writer of one the articles stated that his patriotism (*hamiyet-i milliye*) and the zeal for his ethnicity (*‘asabiyet-i kavmiye*) compelled him not to leave such allegations unanswered.⁷¹⁶ Now, these writers tried to rewrite their own nation’s history while portraying their others, i.e. the Armenians, in the most degrading ways.

⁷¹² Ibid. (No: 592 June 2, 1880).

⁷¹³ Cf. Ibid. No: 585-598 (1880).

⁷¹⁴ See: BOA: Dosya No: 121, Gömlek No: 7231, Fon Kodu: İ.ŞD. Tarih: 20/L /1298 (Hicrî)[1881].

⁷¹⁵ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. No: 589 (May 31, 1980).

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

Hence, one of them portrays Armenians as illiterate, having no history, language, or culture.⁷¹⁷

However, aside from those residing in Istanbul, claims the article, the Armenians were many times more backward than the Kurds.⁷¹⁸ Another individual who was introduced as a Kurdish notable (*mu'teberan-i Kürd dan*) starts his article by pointing to the disadvantaged position of the Kurds. Without explaining why they previously had no access to the Turkish newspaper,⁷¹⁹ the writer states that “now, we have become more aware of our plight due to lack of access to the press, even to the Turkish press, while Armenians have enjoyed easy access to the European press and have been able to portray the Kurds as savages.”⁷²⁰ Then he starts making comparisons of Kurds with Armenians and claims of Kurdish cultural superiority over Armenians, in which a significant racial bias can be sensed. He writes that while Kurds know Arabic, Persian, and their own language, for thousands of years the Armenians have remained as half-savages (*nime vahşi*) roaming aimlessly in a valley of ignorance.⁷²¹

In another article, which is signed by “A. T.,” the Armenians are accused of stigmatizing the Kurds as people who “lack any desire for progress.” However, the same writer claims that “whoever knows Armenians attests to how far the Armenians lag behind when they

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ Another letter, written by a Kurd published in *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, sheds light on the Ottoman papers' treatment of the Kurds. The writer of the letter thanks the paper, since as he writes that was for the first time in thirty years of his life in Istanbul he had seen an Ottoman paper defend the Kurds (No: 597; Jun 9, 1880). However, as indicated earlier, this defense of the Kurds immediately ended with the appointment of the new Grand Vizier, Muhammad Kadri Pasha. Halting pro-Kurdish writings was another indication that the Ottoman state had been assured of its territorial integrity to remain intact. In one of his imperial decrees, Abdulhamid had also hinted these new developments. In editor's column of *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, the Sultan's decree is interpreted as clear sign that—despite the ongoing reforms—the “rightful integrity” of the state will be preserved and Kurdistan, as it is, will remain as an inseparable part of the Empire. See, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* (No: 600; June 12, 1880).

⁷²⁰ Ibid. (No: 586; May 27 1880).

⁷²¹ Ibid. (*vadi zalaletda kalmış*).

are compared with the Kurds.”⁷²² °A. T.’s self-congratulatory remarks know scarcely any limit. So what is his portrayal of the Armenians? He goes so far as to say that the nomadic Kurds greatly value education and the arts, are extremely eloquent and poetic, and “we can say that no other *nation (millet)* has arrived at such an honorable stage.”⁷²³ Whereas Kurds possess these distinct qualities, the Armenians are just like solid objects, how can they even benefit from the Reforms? ... First of all, they have no language of their own. If an Armenian is to become a human being, s/he must [first] learn other people’s languages... While from their early childhood they interact with the Ottoman Turks (*Osmanlı Türkleri*) and spend their entire life in the state’s offices and divans, they still sound Armenian (*ermenî rayihası*) when they speak Turkish.⁷²⁴

‘A. T.’s writing displays how the nationalist elite in each community saw their other as nothing more than ‘sub-humans.’ These types of “shared *emotional dispositions* relate[d] to the attitudes members of a given ingroup have towards other members of that ingroup, as well as those towards members of an out-group.”⁷²⁵ ‘A. T.’s reaction exhibits the racist views of the time and the usual, simplistic connection drawn between race, language and progress. This is in addition to a great deal of psychological distress for being accused as savage and uncivilized, at a time when such stigmas could amount to being jettisoned into the limbo state of “primitiveness”—their fates being left to the whimsy of civilizing powers.

‘A. T. seems to be well versed in European literary canons and apparently he had been translating various European literary texts. In his narration of the Kurdish nation, he does not stop at comparing the Kurdish and Armenian languages and denying the existence of the latter;

⁷²² Ibid. (No:592; June 5, 1880).

⁷²³ Ibid.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ Wodak and others, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 4.

he takes a further step by putting Kurdish language and literature on par with that of Europeans when writes:

[it must be from] our language's extraordinarily perfect development (*fevk al- 'ade mükemmelîyeti ile*) that whatever language we intend to learn, we learn it so easily and speak it as if it is our own native language... Our own language's perfection and our literary works and poetry collections—which are comparable with the works of Lamartine, Homer and Voltaire—enable me to translate our contemporary [European canonical works] into Kurdish.⁷²⁶

What is most striking is how, in this period, history was utilized and how a language's having a high degree of development and having long roots in history were seen to legitimize contemporary nationalist political claims. Therefore, wherever nationalistic sentiments cropped up, histories and people's pasts were blithely radicalized and nationalized. These Kurdish intellectuals' attempts to rewrite history was not an isolated occurrence. However, even in rewriting 'their most ancient past,' European civilization loomed large. Thus, whenever a nation's existence was imagined, even in the most fantastic, anachronistic way, it had to appropriate some aspects of modern European civilization for itself. Hence, the enterprise of rewriting the nation's history is to show how 'we' were distinctly civilized in the past, just as Europeans are today. Here "nationality is narrated," as Uri Ram would put it, "as a story which people tell about themselves in order to lend meaning to their social world."⁷²⁷ In our case, they do so especially to put themselves on equal footing with other nations in terms of 'civilizedness' to legitimate their contemporary political aspirations. Thus, 'our Islamic past,' which differentiates 'us' even from other Muslims and testifies to 'our' distinct place among 'our' coreligionists, demonstrates 'our' potential for progress — the *sine qua non* of the age of modern

⁷²⁶ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*.(No:592; June 5, 1880).

⁷²⁷ Quoted in, Wodak and others, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 19.

nationalism. This was deemed necessary to be considered a nation. ‘A. T.’s writing exemplifies this sentiment when he contends that

most people in the Arab Iraq,⁷²⁸ Aleppo, and all other regions in Sham, be they Turks or Arabs ...cannot become scholars [plural ‘*ulemâ*’; singular ‘*alim*’] without knowing Kurdish. Among these ‘*ulemâ*’ are philosophers whose theological debates would overwhelm Voltaire—if he were resurrected from his grave and confronted with them. So he would have no choice but to bow to them and acknowledge their superiority.⁷²⁹

This passage not only confers upon the Kurdish language a superior status over others but also insinuates that literacy in the Kurdish language was a sign of superior status of scholarship among non-Kurds, as if it were a lingua franca in the above-mentioned Muslim regions. Furthermore, it suggests that they were not just great scholars by the traditional standards of Islamic scholarship; even Voltaire’s acquaintance with their degree of erudition would have made him prostrate before them. The hyperbole and historical inaccuracy in these claims, in a way, may be a common characteristic in nationalist historiography. The point worth noting, however, is that traditional religious scholarship was venerated and conflated with ethnic self-glorification in the modernist and ethno-nationalist claims cited above.

The claims made about the nature of the Kurdish contribution to the Islamic past, taken as separate from Muslim history in general, are striking. This Islamic past becomes primarily Kurdish with no reference to other Muslims, or for that matter to their shared historical, cultural, or religious past. Narrating the nation takes place through reinterpretation of shared experience. This reinterpretation, however, takes place by obscuring the shared aspect of that history and experience; by excluding the Other from the narrative to serve and suit the assumed continuity of the national heritage. In this nationalist historiography, not only is a religious hero like Salah ad-

⁷²⁸ Before the modern era, there were two regions known as Iraq; most of today’s Iraq was referred to as Arab Iraq and some central regions in the current Iranian territory were known as “*Ajam* Iraq.

⁷²⁹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No:592; June 5, 1880).

Din re-appropriated, but also one of the most significant Christian-Muslim encounters is represented as ethnic Kurds' historical triumph. Also, the non-Kurdish share in this particular experience is potentially mythicized. "This narration lends meaning and security to monotonous existence and ties everyday life to a 'national destiny.'"⁷³⁰ Furthermore, the fuzzy division between Kurds and Armenians, a matter which at the time particularly in rural areas confuses historians and missionaries, is shoved aside by bringing the Islamic past into play. However, this is how "identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference. One is a Bosnian Serb to the degree to which one is not a Bosnian Moslem or a Croat."⁷³¹

This writer goes as far as to Kurdify the origins of European civilization—it was then generally referred to as 'the Civilization.' In so doing, however, he emphasizes a distinct Kurdish role. Such an approach to European civilization, claiming a Muslim or common origin for it, was to gain some popularity later among modernist Muslims and nationalist Arabs. However, this type of Kurdish nationalist narration of the Islamic past in such a rosy light, is of a comparatively rare brand. The writer of the article recounts some episodes of Islamic history with a clear Kurdish ethnic bent as the origin of the current European civilization when he writes that

even now Western historians acknowledge that the Ayyubids, like Salah ad-Din, for a century *fought the crusaders and put Europeans onto the path of civilization*. ... A few years earlier—in many of his speeches on the East with repeated references to Salah ad-Din—Mr. Gladstone recognized *the Kurds' service to the Civilization, praised and venerated this illustrious (necib) ethnic group [kevm]*. ... From the ethnological stand point, can anyone show any ethnic Armenian's name mentioned with such a degree of reverence—in any old or modern European historical [sources].⁷³²

Despite the fact that these articles were not numerous, their writers were trying to utilize the scant opportunities they had to make a complete case for 'narrating their nation.' 'A. T. tried

⁷³⁰ Wodak and others, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*: 24.

⁷³¹ Seyla Benhabib quoted in, *ibid.*, 2-3.

⁷³² *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 592; June 5, 1880).

to rewrite some type of ‘history of Kurdish civilization’ to show a large footprint of Kurds in history, and portrayed the Other as having no presence in or relevance to his brand of nationalist historiography of “the Civilization.” There were other writers who strove to draw an eternal and immutable map of Kurdistan that existed since time of immemorial. In an article published in two parts under the title of “Kurdistan or Armenistan?”,⁷³³ the first part being on Kurdistan’s geography and the second on Kurdish ethnography, a Kurdish intellectual attempts to write a historical geography of Kurdistan that is claimed to span more than two millennia. In this case also “The thematic content of discourses of national identity encompasses the construction of a common past, present and future; a common culture; a *common territory*;⁷³⁴ and the concept of a *homo nationalis*.”⁷³⁵

With such emphasis on the imagined eternal geographical unity of Kurdistan, as expected, even Kurdistan’s contemporaneous membership in the Ottoman Empire is entirely “forgotten.”⁷³⁶ For that reason, these claims should not be seen as simple reactions, limited to the Armenian-Kurdish communal contestations. Despite its degrees of scarceness, this literature reveals a situation that is more than just the Muslims’ (Ottoman/Turkish-Kurdish) reaction to Armenian nationalism. As such, the piece on Kurdistan’s geography, in addition to telling the general story of the ‘personified’ nation’s ‘uniquely identifiable’ historical presence; traceable back to ‘mythical times,’⁷³⁷ the nation’s geographical borders too are believed to have ‘remained

⁷³³ Ibid. (No: 595; June, 7 1880).

⁷³⁴ Emphasis added.

⁷³⁵ Here too I barrow Wodak and other’s phraseology, employed to explained a somewhat similar socio-political context. See: Wodak and others, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*: 187.

⁷³⁶ For more on the importance of nationalist forgetting see, Ernest Renan, "What Is Nation?," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha(London ; New York: Routledge, 1990). Also,Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

⁷³⁷ Some of these terms are borrowed from the discussion on Leszek Kolakowski’s view about the construction of national identity and collective memory in *ibid.*, 24-28.

separable.’

One could summarize the objectives of these attempts at (re)writing the historical geography here as follows:

a) to prove the Kurds were not savage and therefore their claim to the land was legitimate. It is done to certify the Kurdish sole historical ownership of the land. As one of these authors asserts, the Kurds had communally been “depicted as ignorant and savages; now this must shock our friends, to see [the Kurds] indulging in sciences (*fünun* [sing. *fenn*]) like history and geography and [to see us] delimiting our nations’ land⁷³⁸ on the pages of the Ottoman papers.”⁷³⁹

b) To claim that the Kurds are a distinct nation. Kurdish notables believed that they were on the losing side of the civilizational battle. They felt the battle could be a determinative factor for their collective destiny. One of the writers clearly gives expression to their common fear when he writes that “we” should end “our silence against all these lies and allegations written about our people (*kavmiyetimize*). Now, due to our silence, we are paying for how we have been depicted in the civilized world, i.e., Europe. We are forced to break our silence.”⁷⁴⁰ The entire civilizational discourse was about the legitimacy of the competing political claims and to prove which community was ‘evolved’ enough to be recognized as eligible for statehood. A great testimony to this view is the claim that the Armenians themselves were “not denying that they were ready to go as far as risk their political survival by turning it into a case to be decided by Europeans.”⁷⁴¹

c) Also, to prove that the land belonged to Kurds and to put an end to what they regarded as “the

⁷³⁸ (*kendi qavmiyetlerinin mevqi’ini ta’rif etmek*).

⁷³⁹ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 595; June, 7 1880).

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid. (No: 591 Jun 2, 1880).

greatest injustices;” that Kurds were so “scorned for calling [their] own homeland Kurdistan.”⁷⁴²

Despite the fact that the main interlocutors of all these articles are the Armenians, they clearly referred to the Kurds as a distinct nation. However, the required self-censorship for writing in the state-sanctioned Ottoman newspapers must not be left unmentioned. These writings do not seem particularly antagonistic toward the state. Nevertheless, the Kurds are generally portrayed with a distinctly primordial nationality and are dissociated from all other Muslims, including the Ottoman Turks. Thusly this point becomes clear in the Kurds’ rewriting of their historical relation with the Ottomans. The Kurds reinterpret the Ottoman Empire’s expansion in the 16th century by which Kurdistan too went under the Empire’s control. This is recounted as the Kurds’ voluntarily acceptance of Ottoman rule.⁷⁴³ Such a revisionist account presupposes or retrojects the birth of the imagined Kurdish nationhood into the distant past. Also, the ‘imagined community,’ here, gains a historical agency and independent existence from the Ottoman state—almost as a partner for unity in the past. In the early 20th century Kurdish intellectuals also repeated such claims. They further argued that since the Kurds had “voluntarily accepted this union in the past”—in the era of the nation-state—it was a moral imperative for the Turks to help Kurds to obtain their independence.⁷⁴⁴

As stated earlier, the concern about ‘the past’ in these writings is mostly an attempt to imbue contemporary political claims with legitimacy. The selective attachments to and detachments from the world and Islamic history by these authors aimed to create a past for Kurds as civilized agents. Also, it was an attempt to justify the present collective and independent

⁷⁴² *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. No: 595, (June, 7 1880).

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*(No: 595; June 7, 1880).

⁷⁴⁴ Jin, no. 3, 1918 as rendered in: Martin Strohmeier, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity : Heroes and Patriots, Traitors and Foes*, Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia, (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2003), 26.

actions and plans—to proclaim a Kurdish awakening. Hence, it was said that “we too will be declaring our plans for the future and we will prove this.”⁷⁴⁵ The author goes on by stating that “we are now particularly worried, and our consciousness of the real nature of the [Great] Powers’ attempts [propagated as] Reforms... makes us even more resolute about determining our own future.”⁷⁴⁶ The author warns, however, that one cannot make any greater blunder than to assume that “the land of Kurdistan lacks any vigor and excitement (*heyecandan ‘ari*) and as you [all] know, the question of Sheikh Ubeydullah Efendi is still an enduring one.”⁷⁴⁷

The last remark indicates that these intellectuals also supported and were hopeful about the plans of Sheikh Ubeydullah—the subject of the next chapter’s discussion. However, since their identity is not revealed by the journal, it is hard to speculate on what kind of organic ties existed between them and the Sheikh.

⁷⁴⁵ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 591; Jun 2, 1880).

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.* (No: 591; Jun 2, 1880).

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter 6

Exclusionary Islam and Kurdish Nationalism: The Case of the Naqshbandi Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nehri

We only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated
refusal of that which others have made of us.
- Jean-Paul Sartre⁷⁴⁸

The current chapter shall be devoted to the religio-nationalist discourse of the 1880 Kurdish uprising under Sheikh Ubeydullah of Nehri. This particular Kurdish uprising offers an important example of the fusion of peripheral Islam with Kurdish ethno-nationalist aspirations. Such a fusion between Islam and nationalism is evident in the documents produced by Kurdish religious leaders, especially the charismatic leader of the uprising, Sheikh Ubeydullah. This chapter discusses the Sheikh's personal account of the major Kurdish-Ottoman Turkish interaction as documented in his Persian *Mesnewi*⁷⁴⁹ along with his personal letters. The religio-political project of Sheikh Ubeydullah is analyzed in order to illustrate how his Islamic revivalism goes hand in hand with his Kurdish nationalism. I employ the Sheikh's writings to shed some light on the Kurdish self-perception and the way they perceived ethnic Others. The 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman war (and the resultant Kurdish interaction with the Ottoman army) constitutes the defining moment in the Sheikh's ethno-nationalist consciousness.

In this chapter, I argue that Sheikh Ubeydullah's writings indicate that he understood the

⁷⁴⁸ Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 17.

⁷⁴⁹ See, Nehri, *Tuhfetul Ehbab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri*.

significance of self-referentiality in making collective political claims. Neither previous Kurdish texts nor Kurdish uprisings reflect the type of ethno-national consciousness that tied collective self-referentiality with the idea of self-rule. For instance, despite Ahmad Xani's (the renowned 17th-century Kurdish poet) emphasis on writing in the Kurdish language,⁷⁵⁰ his poetic oeuvre *Mem u Zin* does not evidence the presence of Kurdish ethno-nationalism.⁷⁵¹

The concluding section of the current chapter offers a more theoretical approach to the Sheikh's revolt. In particular, I will argue that the political statements by the Sheikh and more significantly his political demands could not take place outside the modern paradigm of nationalism. By way of analyzing Sheikh Ubeydullah's writings, I venture to demonstrate the fusion of religion and nationalism. In doing so I intend to make sense of the Sheikh's utterances in the light of works by John Langshaw Austin, Michael Billig, Judith Butler, Partha Chatterjee and Quentin Skinner. Borrowing from Austin's phraseology, I argue that nationalism is a modern 'convention.' Therefore, any utterances that signify the modern nationalist convention would have to be uttered to invoke such a convention. When it comes to the Sheikh, he did invoke the idea of modern nationalism through his religious idiom. Therefore, the Sheikh's uprising has to be understood as a significant case of religious nationalism in the Modern Middle East.

The Rise of Sheikh Ubeydullah

⁷⁵⁰ For a discussion on Xani's attention to writing in Kurdish, see Metin Yüksel, "I Cry out So That You Wake Up: Cegerxwîn's Poetics and Politics of Awakening," *Middle Eastern Studies* (12 Aug 2013.): 3-6.

⁷⁵¹ Cf. Amir Hassanpour, "The Making of Kurdish Identity: Pre-20th Century Historical and Literary Sources," in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Abbas Vali (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2003).

Ubeydullah of Nehri (d. 1883) was a Naqshbandi Sheikh and a Kurdish religious scholar. His main *Khanaqah* (Sufi lodge) was located in the village of Nehri, in the borderland region between the Qajar and Ottoman states. He led rebellions against these states in 1879 and 1880 respectively. In addition to his sporadic personal letters, the Sheikh wrote a *Mesnewî*⁷⁵² to revive what he considered “the true Islam” and “authentic Sufism” to guide “the people of true religion,” i.e., the Kurds.⁷⁵³ He was probably the most prominent Kurdish Sufi Sheikh and community leader of his time. Describing the place of the Sheikh among *Sunni* Muslims, Speer states that “*next to the Sultan and the Sheriff of Mecca the Sheikh was the holiest person among the Sunni Mohammedans*. Thousands were ready to follow him as the vicar of God... He was a man of some real virtues of character, vigorous, just, and courageous.”⁷⁵⁴

The Sheikh must have been concerned about the prospect of an independent Armenian state.⁷⁵⁵ It is clear, however, that he did not share his contemporary Kurdish intellectuals’ negative views (discussed in the preceding chapter) about his Christian neighbors.⁷⁵⁶ There is a

⁷⁵² *Mesnewî* and *Masnawî* respectively Kurdish and Persian pronunciations from Mathnawî... means ‘couplets’ in Arabic (because the second half of the verse in Arabic, ‘thanî’ rhymes with the first). It is the name of a type of poetry (called ‘mathnawî’). The following is an example of the particular mathnawi meter used by Rumi (there are other mathnawi meters used by other Persian sufi poets): XoXX XoXX XoX.

See Dar al-Masnavi: http://www.dar-al-masnavi.org/about_masnavi.html.

In writing his poetry, Sheikh Ubeydullah imitates and tries to reintroduce the *Masnawi* of the famous Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (d.672/1273). See, Nehri, *Tuhfetul Ehhbab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri*.

⁷⁵³ In his account of Kurdish participation in Russo-Ottoman war, the Sheikh appears volubly unrestrained in his exclusionary employment of the religious terminology. In his constant references to Ottoman Turks, the Sheikh identifies them as Romi [Romans, Ottoman Turks here] and further embroiders the religious imaginary with adjectives such as *Ghazi*, the faithful or the believers in his references to the Kurds. For instance, in one couplet the Sheikh states that one Ottoman Turkish commander “had no qualm in his bad treatment of the believers [that is the Kurds] (*bi mahaba bar goruh-e ahl-e dîn*) *ibid.*, 120.

⁷⁵⁴ Robert E. Speer, *The Hakim Sahib, the Foreign Doctor: A Biography of Joseph Plumb Cochran, M. D., of Persia* (New York,: Revell, 1911), 74.

⁷⁵⁵ Jwaideh states that “the fear of the Armenian ascendancy of the in Kurdistan appears to have been one of the most powerful reasons behind the Sheikh’s attempt to unite the Kurds” (Jwaideh 2006, p. 83). It true that “the fear of” a possible Armenian state was an important reason for the Sheikh’s uprising, but it should be kept in mind this was only one among many reasons for his revolt.

⁷⁵⁶ For instance, Speer writes that

significant amount of scholarship that views the Kurdish fear of the emergence of a possible Armenian state as the sole cause for the Sheikh's revolt.⁷⁵⁷ However, it should be emphasized that the evidence used to substantiate this claim is itself contradictory and dubious. The source for the statement below, allegedly uttered by Sheikh, comes from an Ottoman official in Kurdistan who had an active role in campaigning against him.⁷⁵⁸

The Sheikh is famously quoted as saying "what is this I hear, that the Armenians are going to have an independent state in Van, and that the Nestorians are going to hoist the British flag and declare themselves British subjects. I will never permit it; even if I have to arm the women."⁷⁵⁹ No matter how celebrated this quote is, it should be regarded with great caution because: a) Captain Clayton, the British official who reports this, claims that he had heard it from Toussoun Pasha.⁷⁶⁰ Toussoun Pasha was an Ottoman state official in Hakkari, who had stated that he heard this remarks from one his subordinates. b) It seems that this statement has been one of the reasons that some scholars assume the prospect of an Armenian state was the *prima causa*

"he was very fair to the Christians. Two years later when the Sheikh's dream had vanished and he was a prisoner in Constantinople, the Sultan asked him to write a paper describing the condition of the people in Kurdistan. The Sheikh wrote in his paper a great deal about the Nestorian Christians there, praising them as the best subjects of the Sultan. The Sultan objected to such language, and three times returned the letter for correction. Finally the Sheikh said, 'I don't know much about politics, but I do know something about truth telling, and this is the truth.'"

Speer, *The Hakim Sahib, the Foreign Doctor: A Biography of Joseph Plumb Cochran, M. D., of Persia*, 74-5. Also, in his letter to one of his own *Khalifas*, Ubeydullah notes that "I trust Armenians much more than the Persians and the Turks. It is much better for us to unite with the Armenians rather than with the Turks or Persians. The Persians hate us and the Turks want to use us as their tools." *Kavkaz*, 1880; no. 343 and Megu Ayestani, 1880; no.98 cited and quoted in: Celîlê Celîl, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri: Kürt Ayaklanması/ 1880 Shaykh Ubeydullah Nehri's Kurdish Uprising*, trans. M. Aras(Istanbul: Pêrî Yayaninlari, 1998), 109.

⁷⁵⁷ Cf. David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*(London: I.B. Tauris, 2004). Also, Özoglu, "Does Kurdish Nationalism Have a Navel?."

⁷⁵⁸ FO 195 / 1315; No. 23; Clayton Clayton to Trotter; Political (Confidential); Kochhannes, 2nd August 1880.

⁷⁵⁹ Clayton to Trotter; Bashkala, 11th July 1880. FO 195 / 1315/ No. 23 Political [Confidential].

⁷⁶⁰ FO 195 / 1315; No. 23; Clayton to Trotter; Political (Confidential); Kochhannes, 2nd August 1880.

for the Sheikh's revolt.⁷⁶¹ This conversation between Clayton and Toussoun Pasha occurred in July 1880, as Clayton notes that "since my arrival here Toussoun Pasha the Mutesarrif has told me that some little time ago he sent an officer" to visit the Sheikh.⁷⁶² It should be kept in mind that before 1880 the Sheikh had become disillusioned with the Ottoman state and had revolted against it a year earlier. c) Toussoun Pasha relates this story along with two other important pieces of news: 1) Again according to the Pasha, the Sheikh was already trying to build a coalition with Nestorians and "ha[d] sent [a message] to Mar Shimoun to urge him to join forces against the Turkish Government and ha[d] made the same request to the chief Armenian ecclesiastic here, saying that he would protect the Christians."⁷⁶³ The Sheikh had also urged for everyone to refrain from paying taxes to the government.⁷⁶⁴ 2) In addition, the Pasha had told Clayton that "some little time ago" the Sheikh had been trying to send his son to Istanbul with a proposal to pay a large sum "to the Sultan by Bedir Khan Bey when semi-independent, and will offer to pay a still larger sum if his authority over Kurdistan is recognized and his rule is not interfered with."⁷⁶⁵ d) This quote could also be a rumor and part of the Ottoman campaign to pit different communities against one another. Clayton speaks to this reality when he recounts that "Samih Pasha told [him] also that he had heard that the Sheikh had a plan for exterminating the Christians in view of the talk that has been going on about the formation of an Armenian State."⁷⁶⁶ Ottoman officials were trying to spread these rumors, especially after the Sheikh's attack on Iran, to the extent that they were ready to hire Russian mercenaries to scare Christians

⁷⁶¹ Cf. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*; Özoglu, "Does Kurdish Nationalism Have a Navel?."

⁷⁶² FO 195 / 1315; No. 23; Clayton Political (Confidential); Bashkala, 11th July 1880.

⁷⁶³ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁶ FO 195 / 1315; No. 46; Clayton; Van 27th November 1880.

and simultaneously caution British Officials of “the Sheikh’s ulterior motives” and paint his revolt as entirely anti-Christian. Clayton relates that

there is a certain Russian ‘*loupeur*’ named Tchilingiroff, a restless adventurer, who has been acting as a sort of factotum of the Sheikh and *has recently been brought here by the Turkish authorities*. This man has been telling the Armenians that *they all owe their lives to him, that the Sheikh intended to massacre them, but that he had persuaded him to turn against the Persians instead*.⁷⁶⁷ (Emphasis added)

To come back to the Sheikh’s appearance on the Kurdish political scene, Ubeydullah rose to prominence especially during the Russo-Ottoman war (1887–88) as he received a request from Abdülhamid II to join the ‘*jihad*’ against the Russian Army. According to his personal account, the Sheikh was able to gather thousands of armed men.⁷⁶⁸ The Sheikh’s participation in the War became one of the major factors in his growing nationalist sentiment and his disillusionment with the Ottoman state. In 1879, the Sheikh led an unsuccessful uprising against the Ottoman state. However, seeing the superiority of the state forces and an inevitable defeat at hand, he found a way out of this situation and convinced the Sultan that the uprising was not a rebellion against the Sultan himself, but rather an outbreak of the people’s frustration and against the local officials’ corruption. In the following year, perhaps in the hope that the previous year’s rebellion was the end of the Sheikh’s anti-state political activities, the Sultan bestowed his decoration upon him.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁸ Nehri, *Mesnevi Şeyx Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehbab*: 108. Also, Ateş states that:

Sheikh Ubeidullah, in his correspondence with the Sultan Abdulhamid, claimed he headed a force of 30,000. The Ottoman Commander of the Caucasian and Eastern front, Ahmed Mukhtar Pasha, maintained that Sheikh Ubeydullah organized seven *redif* battalions, with battalions coming from other districts as well. In addition to regular troops, he wrote, ‘Sheikh [Ubeydullah] Efendi [from] Hakkari raised 50–60 thousand irregular soldiers, both infantry and cavalry, from his districts of Van province.’”

Ateş, "Empires at the Margins: Toward the History of the Ottoman-Iranian Borderland Peoples, 1843-1881," 311.

⁷⁶⁹ Clayton reports that:

Months later, using his Kurdish league,⁷⁷⁰ which was a broad union of Ottoman and Persian Kurds, the Sheikh took control of major parts of Kurdistan that were under Qajar rule. After a few months, especially when the war took some ugly turns as it increasingly came to be understood as a *Shi'i-Sunni* war, the Sheikh was defeated and squeezed between the Qajar and Ottoman Armies amidst rumors of a possible arrival of the Russian troops to support the Persians.⁷⁷¹ Later on, the Sheikh was removed from his own region and sent to exile in Istanbul. After his escape and return to Hakkari, this time he was sent to Hijaz, where he remained until his death in 1883.

It is important to note that unlike in the previous Kurdish uprising, the Sheikh's activities were not limited to taking up arms and gathering forces to go against the non-Kurdish states. He started his movement with diplomatic efforts in an attempt at convincing the Great Powers that the Kurds were a separate nation. In addition to contacting Russian and British Consuls, he "established contact with the Sharif of Mecca⁷⁷² and Khedive of Egypt."⁷⁷³ He also tried to

Sheikh Obeyd Ullah is working hard to extend his influence. He is ingratiating himself with the Christians and large numbers of the latter have migrated from Gevver into the Sheikh's immediate neighborhood in order to enjoy his protection from other Kurds. There can be no doubt that he still meditates throwing off the Turkish rule. On the other hand Bahri Bey, Samih Pasha's aide-de-camp, is to start this week to bear to the Sheikh the decoration that the Sultan has bestowed upon him. FO 195 / 1315(No. 20, Clayton to Trotter; Van, 25th May 1880).

⁷⁷⁰ Apparently the establishment of the Kurdish league very much troubled the Armenian nationalists in Istanbul and outside the Ottoman territories. Despite the local Christian's participation in the Sheikh's revolt, the Armenian nationalist elite were trying to paint it as threat to the Armenians. Therefore, the British Parliament held an official session to make an inquiry about this league and demanded the members of the British cabinet to explanation the situation in Kurdistan. See, *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. No. 673 & 678 (1880).

⁷⁷¹ *Vakit*, No. 1860. 1880.

⁷⁷² It is hard to know whether Sheikh Ubeydullah was aware of the Sharif's views on the Ottoman caliphate. The Sharif of Mecca was not overly fond of the Ottoman caliphate. In 1979, in talking to foreign officials, the Sharif had remarked that "the Ottoman caliphate no longer enjoy[ed] [Muslim] respect and loyalty. People ask how they could respect and follow someone [as a caliph] who can be deposed by a fatwa issued by his own appointee (*Sheikh al-Islam*)."

Ali Sātan, *Halifeliğin Kaldırılması/ the Abolition of the Caliphate*(Istanbul: Gökkuşbu Yayınları, 2008), 37.

⁷⁷³ Kendal Nezan, "The Kurds under the Ottoman Empire," in *A People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, ed. Gérard Chaliand(London: Zed Press, 1993), 25.

persuade Abbas Mirza Molk Ara, a half-Kurdish Qajar prince, to join his efforts.⁷⁷⁴

The goal here is not to rewrite the chronology of the historical events, which has been dealt with as best as possible by others,⁷⁷⁵ but to investigate how a nationalist discourse fuses with Kurdish religious discourse and into their narration of the nation. This takes place in various contexts and forms: by Kurdish intelligentsia in Istanbul with their emphasis on ethnic Kurdish contributions to Islamic civilization (as shown above), Kurdish migrants and religious leaders from Iran, and by Sheikh Ubeydullah himself, in his political letters and poems. The fusion of religion and nationalism is also visible in these groups and figures' criticism of their others, especially of the states, who are seen guilty for their failings or lack of desire to educate the Kurds.⁷⁷⁶

The rise of Sheikh Ubeydullah signified a new era in the Kurdish politics and presents a modality of its development in which the fusion of nationalism and religiosity were clearly visible. This interesting fusion in the Kurdish political movements, which in some cases lasted until 1960s, endowed them with a unique characteristic. It could be explained by the fact that the Kurds simultaneously represented the religious and ethnic peripheral "Other." The Kurds were generally portrayed as backward and ignorant in the late-Ottoman period. So too did their religiosity, in the eyes of the Ottoman elite, represent a backward Islam.⁷⁷⁷ This was the case, as

⁷⁷⁴ Sheikh Obeidullah to Abbas Mirza (the moolk Ara). *Parliamentary Papers*. Inclosure 4 in No.5/ 61.

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. Ateş, "Empires at the Margins: Toward the history of the Ottoman-Iranian borderland peoples, 1843-1881."; Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, 1st ed., Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006).; Robert W. Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, 1st ed.(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).

⁷⁷⁶ Some of these criticisms are reiterated decades later in 1925 Sheikh Said's proclamation of a Kurdish caliphate in which he blames the Turkish state's purposeful abandonment of Kurdish education.

⁷⁷⁷ These negative views are traceable in common Turkish expressions. For instance, "the god of the Kurds and of dogs is one" or "there ain't no God for Kurds and dogs (*Kürt ile itin Allahı birdir*); and there is a mutual hate between God and Kurds (*Allah Kürdü, Kürd Allahı sevmez*). Rohat Alakom, *Türk Edebiyatında Kürtler/ the Kurds in Turkish Literature*, Avesta (Beyoglu, Istanbul: Avesta, 2010), 33-4.

mentioned in the foregoing chapters, not just because Kurdish Islam in particular, and non-Turkish Islam more generally, was deemed outdated, and the Ottoman elite believed that “without receiving light from the Istanbul’s enlightenment”⁷⁷⁸ no nation could possibly leap to their stage of modern comprehension of Islam. Moreover, when it comes to the Qajar/Iranians’ and Kurds’ perceptions of each other, the *Shi’i- Sunni* or Kurd- *‘Ajam* [non-Kurdish Iranians] divide represented a much wider intercommunal chasm than the division between the peripheral *Shafi’i/ Naqshbandi/ Kurds vis-à-vis the official Ottomans/Turkish Hanafi* Islam across the border. This classification should not be seen odd. *Shafi’i* school showed persisted stubbornness in its refusal to follow the officially propagated *Hanafi* school of law in the Empire. “This branch of Islam had not followed the Hanefis, (Hanafis), the main Ottoman mezhep (school of law) in its supine attitude towards the state.”⁷⁷⁹

“The Kurds’ Religion is Different”⁷⁸⁰

There is a great body of scholarship on Sheikh Ubeydullah’s rising in 1880.

Unfortunately, except for a few letters by the Sheikh himself, his *Mesnewi* was not available⁷⁸¹ to

⁷⁷⁸ See Chapter Four.

⁷⁷⁹ Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey*, 60.

⁷⁸⁰ In October 1880 in a letter to Dr. Cochran, an American missionary in the Hakkari region, the Ubeydullah wrote that “the Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. *Their religion is different* [from that of others], and their laws and customs distinct (*Parliamentary Papers*. 1881, 5:47-48).

⁷⁸¹ Unfortunately, Sheikh Ubeydullah’s *Mesnewi* was not available to the public until 2000. As Seyid Islam Duagû explains in his introduction to his edition of the Sheikh’s *Mesnewi*, he was able to find three copies of the manuscripts after years of research, each of which had been reproduced from earlier copies exclusively accessible to the Sheikh’s family and followers. The entire collection is over 6,000 couplets in which the Sheikh claims to imitate and explicate Rumi’s *Masnawi*. The published version is a copy of the manuscript that was reproduced in 1962. This version’s differences vis-à-vis the other unpublished versions are rendered in the footnotes. See the introduction to Nehri, *Tuhfetul Ehhbab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri*.

those who have studied his uprising before. The lack of attention to the *Mesnewi* is partly due to the fact that it was not available in print. It existed only in the form of a manuscript available to the close relatives and follower of the Sheikh. Also, it is written in Persian. Most likely Persian constituted an important barrier for the new generation of the Sheikh's relatives who were living on the Turkish side of Kurdistan to have access to the Sheikh's poetry. Furthermore, except for the work of Sabri Ateş, most of the scholarship concentrates on non-Persian documents in studying the Sheikh's revolt. This is why for long the *Mesnewi* remained a manuscript unknown to people other than close relatives and followers of the Sheikh in the East. It took this poetry book over a century to appear in Persian print.

The Sheikh's *Mesnewi* offers a firsthand account about his political and nationalist thoughts, which help us to get a better grasp of how his religious and nationalist views were intersecting. Jwaideh's pioneering work more than any other has revealed a great deal about the Sheikh's personality and his thoughts. Had Jwaideh had a chance to consult this collection of poetry, he could have offered even more about the Sheikh's thoughts, his approach to Islam, politics, Kurdish nationalism and national identity, and the religious content of that identity. Jwaideh was among the first scholars, if not *the* first to note that "The Sheikh's contention that the Kurds' religion was different from that of the others is extremely significant. It indicates the extent to which nationalism depends on exclusiveness and difference."⁷⁸² Jwaideh contends that the Sheikh's claim was untenable, particularly when it came to the Kurds' religious differences with the Turks. However, "in order to emphasize the complete distinctiveness of the Kurds, the Sheikh magnified denominational differences and made this extravagant claim."⁷⁸³

⁷⁸² Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, 81.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

Even if one assumes that these claims were made by a prominent Kurdish Naqshbandi Sheikh merely to garner British and Western political support, it does not diminish their validity. It still demonstrates that making a distinction between the Kurds' religion and their Turkish brethren's did not bother him and that this was not seen, as an Orientalist might suppose, as an act that was harmful to the unity of the "*umma*" or as a *Sunni* Muslim's breach of his assumed pledge to "the caliphate." The existence of the Ottoman caliphate seems to have had no effect on the Sheikh's thinking when he wrote those letters or when he sought non-Muslim support to divide 'the caliph's domain.' Nonetheless, this self-differentiation on the Sheikh's part as a member of a national community was necessary for "imagining national singularity and homogeneity."⁷⁸⁴ This 'imagined homogeneity' simultaneously takes the form of "construct[ing] the distinctions between themselves and other nations, most notably when the other nationality is believed to exhibit traits similar to those of one's own national community, similar to what Freud called the 'narcissism of small differences'."⁷⁸⁵

The Sheikh's poems about the Russo-Ottoman War and preparation for it, which must have been composed after the war,⁷⁸⁶ illustrate his admiration for Abdülhamid II solely as a person. He never refers to the Sultan as a caliph,⁷⁸⁷ but the Sheikh does not hesitate to call him

⁷⁸⁴ I am borrowing the phrasing from Wodak and others, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 4.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁶ He indicates that he delayed finishing the book because of the War. Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehbab*: 104.

⁷⁸⁷ According to the Russian Officer, P. İ. Averyanov, the Sheikh did not believe in the legitimacy of the Ottoman claim to caliphate. Averyanov claims that according to the Sheikh "the Ottomans had taken Islamic caliphate by force and this was a violation of the Islamic law. Therefore, the Sheikh and his ancestors used to support Iraqi Kurd's rebellion against the [Ottoman] Turks for reclaiming the caliphate." Averyanov also claims Sheikh Ubeydullah and all "the Botani Kurds held that the caliph must be a descendent of Bani Abbas, not an Ottoman. The Turks usurped caliphate, which was the right of Abbasid." P. İ. Averyanov, *Osmanlı - Rus Ve İran Savaşları'nda Kürtler 1801-1900/ the Kurds in Persian, Ottoman and Russian Wars 1801-1900*, trans. Muhammed (Hoko) Varlı (Xani)(Istanbul: Sİpan Yayıncılık, 1995), 214-16. It should be noted that at one of his personal letters to the Sultan, the Sheikh uses the term *Khilafet-panahi* (the refuge of *Khilafa*) Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 1525, Fon Kodu: PRK.ASK.

an *Imam*⁷⁸⁸ or as the promulgator of the religion and of justice.⁷⁸⁹ Apparently, at least when he wrote his *Mesnewi*, the Sheikh felt a significant amount of respect toward the Sultan, especially after hearing that the Sultan could not control his outburst of emotions when he read the Sheikh's letter—calling on Kurds to join the *jihad* against Russia, in 1877.⁷⁹⁰ The Sheikh had been told that the letter was so moving that made Sultan unable to read the letter himself in its entirety. Therefore Abdülhamid asked an *Imam* sitting next to him to read the rest of the letter to him.⁷⁹¹ It is clear that Ubeydullah perceives the Sultan's reaction as a sign of his great religious devotion and piety. The Sheikh thinks that Abdülhamid concurs with him that the calamities that had befallen the Ottoman state were the result of the abandonment of Islamic traditions and laws and the spread of a great moral laxity (*bar Kabā'er moşerr*).⁷⁹² In the “absence of a true faith in Islam,” how could the Ottomans expect anything other than shameful defeats?⁷⁹³ However, the Sheikh was of the opinion that the Ottoman state was too corrupt for Abdülhamid to reform it. It was beyond his ability to make the required and necessary structural changes (*tabdil in hay'at*). Ubeydullah claims that the spread of this non-Islamic culture had reached a point where

Tarih: 7/ Temmuz /1296 (Hicrî) [7.19 .1880]. There are other letters in which the Sheikh does not even use this term. Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 1492, Fon Kodu: PRK.ASK. Tarih: 20/Haziran /1296(Hicrî) [7.1.1880].

⁷⁸⁸ Unlike *Shi'i* Muslims, *Sunnis* use the term *Imam* very loosely. Mostly, *Sunnis* consider the word *Imam* to have a general ('*aam*) application. However, the word *khalifa* (caliph) has particular ('*akhass*) applicability. Many prominent *Sunni* scholars contend that the term caliph cannot be used for anyone other than the first four successors of the Prophet Mohammad. It is worth noting that Seyyid Bey, the Turkish Justice Minister in 1924, who was very well versed in the traditional Islamic studies, made the same argument in favor of the abolishment of the caliphate. See, pp. 55-65 in Tbm Zabitları (Turkish Grand National Assembly's Debates): , (VII, 1 Mart 1340 (1924)), <http://www.tufs.ac.jp/common/fs/asw/tur/htu/data/HTU2136%28ZC%29-35/index.djvu>.

⁷⁸⁹ Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehab*: 130.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 110.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

⁷⁹² (*garche sultan mayay-e fath ve zafar---did dar ejra'-ye shar'-e namvar*): ibid., 110.

⁷⁹³ (*zan sabab iman namandeh dar qolub--- az che nasar ayad ze 'allam al-ghiyub*): ibid.

Abdülhamid could no longer exert his power or rule effectively.⁷⁹⁴

Such assertions not only illustrate the Sheikh's great disappointment with the entire Ottoman state apparatus, but also shed light on the incompatible appropriation of Islam by the center and by the periphery, which in turn signifies ethnic and communal differences as well. As discussed in preceding chapters, even though the Ottoman elite usually saw peripheral Islam in a negative light, they tolerated some aspects of it, particularly those that could be put into the service of more effective governance. An Ottoman official's remarks about Sheikh Ubeydullah and Kurdish Islam in 1873 showcase this dual approach to Islam in the periphery on the part of the elites when he states:

[The Sheikh] works to bring the Kurds, who are inclined toward idolatry, onto the straight path of Islam. The township [*naḥiye*] of Shamdinan where the Sheikh lives is on the path of tribal migration routes and on the border [i.e., on the periphery of the Ottoman domains]. The order and security of this locality would have required three or four battalions. However, because of the Sheikh's presence and help ... only a local supervisor [*mudîr*] and eight police forces [*zabṭiye*] are enough to govern and collect all ... [the] taxes on time.⁷⁹⁵ (Emphasis added)

Such views and perceptions about the Kurds become even worse when expressed by Persian elites. For instance, an Iranian bureaucrat, Askandar Qurains, describes the Sheikh as "the religious leader of the nomadic tribes that are ignorant of any tradition and religion."⁷⁹⁶ Qajar officials viewed the Kurds as a group of people who lived "on the borders of the sublime Qajar and Ottoman states." To those officials, the Kurds were "imprudent, ignoramus-like, vile, and ungodly people...nomadic *Sunnis*, residing in high and unreachable mountains, most of whom

⁷⁹⁴ (*kardeh bidinān salbe ikhtiyar---bar sare mellat ze daste shariyar*):ibid.

⁷⁹⁵ Necib Ali's report rendered in Ateş, "Empires at the Margins: Toward the History of the Ottoman-Iranian Borderland Peoples, 1843-1881," 333.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

blindly follow[ed] the misguided Sheikh Ubeydullah.”⁷⁹⁷

Existing documents from the period above all show that the Kurdish community and its religious leaders too were mostly oblivious to the Ottoman Sultan’s proclaimed religious status.⁷⁹⁸ A document from the era, a petition written in Persian by Kurdish refugees in the city of Van to the Russian Consul in 1880, demonstrates that the *Sunni* Ottoman Caliph and the *Shi‘i* Qajar king were equally hated by the *Sunni* Kurds.⁷⁹⁹ Save for the *Shi‘i*-populated city of Kermanshah, the petition shows not only the signatories representing almost every major Kurdish town in Persia, it also bears witness to the religious notables’ abhorrence to both states. The document was signed by the Friday prayers’ *Imams*, high-ranking clerics, judges, *muftis* and merchants (*tüccâr*; sing. *tacir*) from different Kurdish cities and towns in East Kurdistan/Iran.⁸⁰⁰ The petitioners cite their war with the state as their reason for fleeing Iran. However, they claim to have halted their war with the Qajar state due to their fear of Ottoman interference. They also claim to represent about 500,000 refugees who had apparently entered the Ottoman borders,⁸⁰¹ a number that probably constituted one fifth of the entire Kurdish population at the time.⁸⁰²

Observing this phenomenon of the reciprocal effect of religious views and ethnicity, Basil Nikitin, who spent a considerable time among the Kurds as a Russian dignitary, states that

⁷⁹⁷ Alikhan Gunekhan Afshar, *Tarikh-E Khruj Akrad Va Qatl Va Gharat-E Ubeydullah-E Badbonyad Va Eghteshash Va Fitmay-E Ziyad Dar Mamlakat-E Azarbayjan, 1297/ the Kurdish Rebellion: The Ill-Natured Ubeydullah’s Massacres and Pillage in 1880.*, trans. Mhemed Heme Baqi(Hewlir: Aras, 2007), 30 & 221.

⁷⁹⁸ Cf. Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages from Kurdish People’s History*, 56.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

⁸⁰² In his letter, Sheikh Ubeydullah claims that the total population of the Kurds was around 500,000 families at the time (averaging around 5 per family); see Olson and Celîl.

the Kurds show as much resistance to the *Romîs*⁸⁰³ (*Sunni* Ottoman/ Turks) as they do to the *Ajams* (non-Kurdish Iranian *Shi'ies*). Because what makes the Kurds remain attached to Islam is not new modernist interpretation. The Kurds are attached to a type of Islam that is the legacy of the tribes and mountaineers that has always separated them for a *stubborn will to independence and rebelliousness* against the *foreign forces* from the plains that *strove to civilize and to urbanize* them in order to make them obedient to the new laws and regulations required by the urban life.⁸⁰⁴ (Emphasis added)

Although Nikitin takes notice of the depth of these differences, he tries to explain such religious differences by connecting them to the 'immutability' of the Kurdish rural worldview. Of course, Nikitin later contradicts himself by making another generalization when asserting that the Kurds "are lacking religious prejudice."⁸⁰⁵ He also points to the important role of Sufi orders (*ṭariqât*) in obstructing foreign political influence in Kurdistan.⁸⁰⁶ Nikitin rightly shows that the anti-foreign attitudes of these orders created a type of buffer zone against Kurdish absorption by ruling ethnic groups. However, the very emergence of those orders in itself evidences the instability of religious elements among the Kurds, which in Bruinessen's phrasing corresponds with "a period of great upheaval and important political changes in Kurdistan."⁸⁰⁷ In the 18th century, the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandi, for instance, began to grow and would later become the dominant order in Kurdistan.⁸⁰⁸ It was a reformist movement in the sense that it

⁸⁰³ The Ottoman Turks are commonly known as the Turks of Anatolia or the Turks of Rome. Nikitin also refer to the Iranian *Shi'is* and the Ottoman Turks as *Ajams* and *Romîs* as they were referred to by the Kurds.

⁸⁰⁴ Basil Nikitin, *The Kurds and Kurdistan*, trans. Muhammad Qazi, 2 ed.(Tehran.: Nilufar Publication, 1987a.), 446-47.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 461.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., 459.

⁸⁰⁷ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*(London ; Atlantic Highlands, N.J., USA: Zed Books, 1992), 228.

⁸⁰⁸ Hamid Algar, "The Naqshbandî Order: A Preliminary Survey of Its History and Significance," *Studia Islamica*, no. No. 44 ((1976)): 150-52.

introduced a new interpretation of Islam.⁸⁰⁹ The Khalidi, unlike some other Sufi orders, was not a quietist Sufi group and concerned itself greatly with politics.⁸¹⁰

It was part of the revivalist movement in ‘the pre-modern Muslim world.’ Khalidi revival was part of the general “orthodox revival” branded by Islamic modernist thinker Fazlur Rahman, as a revival “against the corruption of religion and the moral laxity and degeneration prevalent in Muslim society in the outlying provinces of the Ottoman Empire and in India.”⁸¹¹ What is at stake here is not to shed a positive or negative light on these movements but to draw attention to the complexity and volatility of the Islamic religious traditions and the way they came to be understood. Labeling them as the religious views of the tribes and mountaineers does not explain how they came about and developed, but reflects the center’s influence on the studies of the periphery. This possibility of religious reforms should in itself be an indication of a more complex situation than mere loyalty to the tribe and to the mountain dwellers’ religious traditions. However, stereotypes about ‘tribalism’ and the impact of mountains on the Kurdish Islamic beliefs aside, one can identify a type of Kurdish ethnic bent when it comes to their religiosity and their skepticism about their others’ religious sincerity.⁸¹² Kurdish religious leaders have generally shown traces of ethnocentrism in comparing their own religiosity with the forms prevalent among the *Sunni* Turks and *Shi‘i* Iranians. It was indicated earlier that Sheikh

⁸⁰⁹ According to Mardin, “Shaikh Khalid's propaganda was successful in causing members of important Qadiri families in Kurdistan to change over to the Naqshabandiyya, with considerable effect upon the subsequent history of Kurdish nationalism.” Serif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey :The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, Suny Series in Near Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), 58.

⁸¹⁰ Cf. Ateş, “Empires at the Margins: Toward the history of the Ottoman-Iranian borderland peoples, 1843–1881,” 320–23. Also, Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, especially 222–34.

⁸¹¹ Ateş, “Empires at the Margins: Toward the history of the Ottoman-Iranian borderland peoples, 1843–1881,” 196.

⁸¹² These types of religious peculiarities are not uncommon among different ethnic groups and nationalities. See for example, Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941–1945*.

Ubeydullah without any hesitation claimed a distinct Kurdish religiosity in his letters to the foreign Consuls.

A Kurdistan-Centered Islamic Revivalism

Having discussed Islam as a condition of difference between the center and the periphery, now we shall take up the influence of ethnic perceptions on Sheikh Ubeydullah's revivalist project. Aside from his *Mesnewi*, there is not much literature available to provide us with the specifics or particularities of his revivalism. The Sheikh's *Mesnewi* is supposed to be a religious revivalist project. He claims that he wrote his own *Mesnewi* to present a key to the understanding of or to revive that of Rūmī.⁸¹³ The Sheikh's *Mesnewi*, however, mostly concentrates on the Naqshbandi branch of Islamic Sufism. The book is a poetic detailing of the history of the Order and a guidebook for the followers of this *Tariqat*. His new poetic account in a sense was a reconstruction of the Naqshbandi Order's history to differentiate "its original and uncontaminated teachings" from the existing and prevalent misrepresentations of it by the contemporary generation.⁸¹⁴ According to the Sheikh, the distance of people's knowledge about the Order from its original teachings had reached a point where one could hardly find any resemblance between the two.⁸¹⁵

Sheikh Ubeydullah's views in many ways resembled those of other Muslim revivalists.

⁸¹³ The ultimate aim in writing his *Mesnewi*, maintains the Sheikh, was to explain the *Mesnewi* of Rūmī's since the deep meanings in the poetry of the prince (Amir) of this *tariqat* had yet to be revealed to the 'avām—the common people. See Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehbab*: 133.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁸¹⁵ The people who currently adhere to the Order, hardly know anything about it (*ghaleb az ahl-e tariqat dar zaman--mi nadanest az tariqat yak neshan*). Ibid.

He was disturbed by the general direction of the contemporary state of affairs. He had very pessimistic views of the Ottoman state. It is clear that the Sheikh believed that the Ottoman state's deficiencies were rooted in its indifference toward Islamic laws and its teachings. He considers Ottoman laws to be in direct opposition to Islam, or counter-*Shari'a* (*khelaf-e shar*).⁸¹⁶ To him, Islamic laws are nothing more than the Qur'anic verses and the Prophetic tradition and therefore anything incompatible with them is *bid'a* (forbidden innovation).⁸¹⁷ This illustrates a somewhat 'Abduh and Rida-type *Salafi*-ism conflated with Sufi teachings in the Sheikh's approach to the religious revival. He even invokes the idea of commonality of the Islamic *umma*'s laws when he contends that "the laws of this *umma* — which are the best of all laws — are grounded in the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition."⁸¹⁸

It seems, however, that his brand of revivalism differed from that of figures like 'Abduh and Rida in the sense that Ubeydullah was solely focused on reviving religion among the ethnic Kurds. Sheikh Ubeydullah was mostly concerned with the state of affairs in Kurdistan, and this is an area that separates him from other Muslim revivalists. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the Arab revivalists too had their own nationalistic agenda. 'Abduh as well believed that "the Ottomans had usurped caliphate and the Turks were unable to grasp the spirit of the Muhammadan message since they were late converts."⁸¹⁹ Yet unlike Sheikh Ubeydullah, they at the same time concerned themselves with the Muslim world in general. However, the Sheikh does not pay much attention to the Muslim world beyond Kurdistan.

Sheikh Ubeydullah particularly holds positive views about Muslim Kurds religious

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid., 111.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ Hamid Enyat quoted in Sātan, *Halifeliğin Kaldırılması/ the Abolition of the Caliphate*, 39.

devotion but simultaneously he is highly critical of the Sufi Orders, including his own Naqshi Order. He sees the degeneration in Kurdistan as the degeneration of the Sufi Orders. This is why he thinks that he is obliged to revive the previous generations' Sufi tradition⁸²⁰ for two reasons: a) the degeneration of the Sufi Orders. b) The existence of an exceptional degree of religious enthusiasm in Kurdistan, which requires guidance and spiritual leadership.⁸²¹ Without real guidance, asserts Ubeydullah, all this religious enthusiasm and excitement could lead down a wrong path.⁸²² He claims that the obligatory nature of the religious (or *tariqat*'s) following necessitates writing a second *Mesnewi* to abide by the first and revive it.⁸²³

From the Sheikh's perspective, the Sufi tradition in Kurdistan was losing its meaning and internal dynamism. Instead of achieving higher stages of spirituality through required training and obtaining the necessary knowledge, it was becoming a matter of inheritance. To pass the stages of Sufism, a Sufi no longer needed long years of study and deep personal spiritual endeavors.⁸²⁴ Therefore, despite their religious passion, the Kurds were roaming in the plains of religion (*ṣaḥrā-ye dīn*).⁸²⁵ According to Ubeydullah, to the contrary of what has been the tradition of the *Salaf* (pious forebears), which comprises being critical of oneself and tolerant of others' shortcomings, the contemporary Sufis perceived themselves as paragons of piety and

⁸²⁰ "The descendants have moved astray from the ancestors' tradition and they have introduced forbidden innovations (*tark kardē har kas āsār-e salaf--- mukhtari' gashtē bē bid'at har khalaf*).” Therefore, I “ventured at revealing [or reviving] those pious people works (*lā 'alaj āmad jasrat dar miyan--- kē konam āsār-e īn pakān 'ayān*). Ibid., 131.

⁸²¹ (*layk chon mī bud Kordestān hamē--- taleb-e īn 'ishq o shūr o zamzamehē*). Ibid., 130.

⁸²² (*har kas migasht dar ṣaḥrā-ye dīn*) ibid.

⁸²³ If it were not obligatory first [to follow masters], *Masnavi* [by Rumi] would not have been emulated. (*gar nabudī zarurat pey-ravī---khod namigashī mošanna Mašnavī*). Ibid., 129.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 130.

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

charged others with mischief.⁸²⁶

Another area that sets the Sheikh apart from other Muslim revivalist groups and figures is his approach to the Islamic past and its golden age. To the Sheikh who believed in the constancy of *tajdid* (renewal),⁸²⁷ Islamic history, along with the exceptional era of the Prophet and *Rashidun*, presented many golden ages as one that was located in Kurdistan's recent past. The Sheikh called for the return to a pristine Islam, defined in the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, which was practiced and revived in 'the great Sufi tradition' even by the previous generation in Kurdistan. The memories of it were still fresh, just a few decades earlier when "*Ḥaẓrat*" or Mawlana Khalid, the founder of the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandi Order was still around. Again, to the contrary of the more universalistic visions of those revivalists like Afghani or 'Abduh, the Muslim "degeneration"⁸²⁸ in Kurdistan was what mostly disturbed the Sheikh, which started not with the Umayyad's rule.⁸²⁹ It started with the death of his father and of Mawlana Khalid Naqshbandi in the first half of the 19th century. He believed Kurdistan was going through a process of degeneration in two senses: First, Kurdistan's loss of vigor that began over a half a century earlier — at which time, according to the Sheikh, Kurdistan was a center of

⁸²⁶ Ibid., 131.

⁸²⁷ Muhammad Iqbal claims that idea that a *mujaddid* (renovator) appear at the head of every century popularized by Jalāl-ud-Dīn Suyūti in 16th century. See; chapter V in: Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

⁸²⁸ Even when it is not explicitly stated, the idea of degeneration is embedded in attempts for the revival. In the 19th century, the sense of Muslims' digression from the right path was one of the major explanations for the European military, technical and scientific superiority. In the 1940s, Abu al-Hassan al-Nadawi wrote a book on the same subject, which well represents such views on decadence and Muslims' distance from the golden age of Islam. Sayyid Qutb wrote a forward for al-Nadawi's book in which Qutb states that this book was the best work he had ever read on the subject. See, Abu al-Hassan Al-Nadawi, *Madha Khasare Al- 'Alim Bi Inḥitati Al-Mulismiin/ Muslim Degeneration and the World's Loss* (Cairo: al-Iman, 1945), 10.

⁸²⁹ For the representation of this approach to Islamic history, which tries to locate "the genesis of Muslim decadence" see, Maududi, *Khilafat Va Mulukiyyat / the Caliphate and Kingship*.

learning which attracted all those who were in pursuit of knowledge from around the world.⁸³⁰ Kurdistan was a garden of knowledge; people “from every region and every ethnic origin (*qawm*, Arabic, and *qowm*: Persian])” came to Kurdistan to harvest its fruits of knowledge.⁸³¹ The Sheikh laments that in contrast to this, now “those seas of knowledge and illumination” have faded away and what is left is nothing but a façade.⁸³² He claims that the spirit of the previous generation’s legacy has been lost⁸³³ and accuses many of the existing Sheikhs and *khalifas* of ignorance and indulging in “nonsensical claims of having access to the unseen world.”⁸³⁴ From the Sheikh’s perspective, they were lacking in any real mystical experience or spiritual acquisitions. This is how, according to the Sheikh, Kurdistan had lost its vibrancy and “its seas of light are dried up.”⁸³⁵

⁸³⁰ Undoubtedly the Sheikh’s claim contains some elements of truth about Kurdistan being a center of scholarship in Islamic world. Here is what the renowned Ottoman historian, Kâtib Çelebi, had to say in this regard:

From the beginning of the Ottoman Empire till the time of the late Sultan Süleyman [r. 1520–66], scholars who combined the study of the sacred sciences with that of philosophy were held in high renown. Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror [r. 1451–81], had built the Eight Colleges... and had appointed lessons in the Notes on the *Tajrid* [a treatise on *kalâm* by Nasir ad-Din Tusi] and the commentary on the *Mawâqif* [a treatise on *kalâm* by Jurjani]. Those who came after put a stop to these lessons as being “philosophy” and thought it reasonable to give lessons on the *Hidâyâ* [a manual of Hanafi *fiqh* by al-Marghinani] and *Akmal* [a Koranic commentary by an-Nasafi]. But as restriction to this was not reasonable, neither philosophy nor *Hidâyâ* and *Akmal* was left. Thereupon the market for learning in Turkey slumped, and the men of learning were nigh to disappearing. Then the novices of scholars who were working in some outlying places, here and there in the land of the Kurds, came to Turkey and began to give themselves tremendous airs. Seeing them, some capable men in our time became students of philosophy. As a student, I, the humble writer of these lines, in the course of discussion and study, was encouraged by some men of talent, as Plato was encouraged by Socrates, to acquire knowledge of the truths of things. (Kâtib Çelebi, *The Balance of Truth*; quoted in: Yuksel, “Dengbej, Mullah, Intelligentsia: The Survival and Revival of the Kurdish-Kurmanji Language in the Middle East, 1925--1960. Unpublished Dissertation ”.)

⁸³¹ Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehab*: 128.

⁸³² Ibid.

⁸³³ Ibid.

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

⁸³⁵ Ibid.

The second aspect of this process of degeneration, to which Jwaideh devoted close attention, is the absence of a sovereign Kurdish state and the overall deterioration of the socio-political situation. The Sheikh does not say much about whether or not the first situation was caused by the second. However, scholarship on 19th-century Ottoman Kurds unveils the devastating impact of the destruction of the Kurdish principalities on the socio-political conditions in Kurdistan.⁸³⁶

The Sheikh not only views the state as an institution that could establish order and security but also as a civilizing or modernizing agent. To him, one of the most important roles that a state could play is to educate the populace. This aspect of the state's role is almost always alluded to in the Sheikh's statements, letters, and poems. It is one of the most important factors to sway the Sheikh in his drive for an independent Kurdish state.⁸³⁷ This approach to the state becomes evident particularly in the following excerpt from the Sheikh's letter to the American missionary Dr. Cochran when he writes:

Among other evil things, you have probably heard of the [Kurdish] tribe of ... Shkak, who are famous for their evil and ruin-causing deeds... and [who] will *remain in their savage state*... The Ottoman Government also, like the Persian, either *has not the means of civilizing*⁸³⁸ *these people or else neglects them*. Kurdistan has got a *bad reputation* and *has been disgraced*, *distinction is not made between peaceable and evil-disposed persons*.⁸³⁹ (Emphases added)

In this letter's preceding paragraph, the Sheikh contends that the Ottoman and the Persian governments intentionally avoid educating those Kurds since "their savage state" helps the two

⁸³⁶ Cf. Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*. Also, Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*.

⁸³⁷ Cf. The Sheikh's letters to Iqbal ad-Dowleh in: Celil, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages of the Kurdish Nation's History*: 38-43.

⁸³⁸ Instead of civilizing, education is used in the Turkish translation, which in turn was a translation of the French rendition of the Sheikh's letter.

⁸³⁹ A letter from Ubeydullah to Dr. Cochran, dated October 5, 1880. *Correspondence. Turkey. Enclosure 3. No: 5/61* (1881).

governments to justify their policies in Kurdistan. Therefore, he accuses the Ottoman and Qajar state of doing two things at once against the Kurds. On the one hand, they refrain from educating the Kurds and even allow some tribes to commit all kinds of crimes; on the other, they use this to paint all the Kurds as savage. This is why, argues the Sheikh, all Kurds are infamously known as savages. Thus,

[b]e it known to you for certain that this has all been caused by the laches of the Turkish and Persian authorities, for Kurdistan is in the midst between these two countries, and both Governments, for their own reason, do not distinguish between good and evil characters. It is thus that bad characters remain unreformed, respectable people get an ill repute and become ruined.⁸⁴⁰

It seems the Sheikh saw the creation of a state as instrumental to the success of his revivalist project as well. He not only thought of the state as the provider of the law and order but also as the grantor of an educated nation. It is evident that to the Sheikh, education was a panacea for the Kurdish plight. In addition, to him, the lack of public education in Kurdistan was the principal reason for Kurdish exclusion. In his letter to Iqbal ad-Dowla,⁸⁴¹ the Sheikh writes, “we admit that there are bad Kurds along with the good ones but there is no one who even thinks of educating ... [the bad and therefore it is impossible] for the Kurds to right their wrongs and to have a more decent and humane society... without education.”⁸⁴² To him, public education held the key to a more decent and humane life and a way for the Kurds to escape from their present miseries.

The instrumental role of education is frequently reiterated to a degree that even the Sheikh’s surrogates seem to subscribe to the importance of public education. In his meeting with the British General Consul Abbott, the Sheikh’s brother-in-law also echoed his concern and

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁴¹ The governor of Urmia in the 1880s.

⁸⁴² Celil, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages of the Kurdish Nation’s History*: 42.

“declared that Ubayd Allah, if successful, undertook to suppress brigandage, restore order within the borders of Turkey and Persia, place Christians and Muslims on equal footing of equality, *promote education*,⁸⁴³ and allow churches and schools to be built.”⁸⁴⁴

It is clear the Sheikh believed that the materialization of those projects would have required a state power. Undoubtedly, he also believed those objectives must be appealing to the Europeans and by the same token they were all modern.⁸⁴⁵ His brother in-law, while asking for the moral support of the Europeans in creating a Kurdish state, presents these stated strategic goals. He goes as far as to say that if Ubeydullah reneged from those *promises* he had made, “he was prepared to be judged by the tribunal of Europe, and to abide by the consequences.”⁸⁴⁶ Simultaneously, the Sheikh was making the case, through his surrogate, that neither the Persians nor the Ottomans were willing to take such important steps for the welfare of the Kurds and the Christians.

As can be inferred from the above documents, the Sheikh sees a direct correlation between the lack of public education and the existence of such a phenomenon as brigandry, which the Sheikh, if successful in creating a state, promised to eradicate. In his *Mesnewi*, in which he does not have foreign interlocutors, he does not acknowledge the existence of Kurdish brigandry. However, he asserts that no matter how great one’s capabilities are or how noble one’s ancestry (*aşl-e najib*) might be, one needs a proper education to fulfill one’s potential.

⁸⁴³ Emphasis added.

⁸⁴⁴ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its origins and development*: 85.

⁸⁴⁵ All the evidences indicate that the Sheikh was much interested and had a fair understanding of the changing world. Dr. Cochran remarks that the Sheikh “seemed to enjoy conversing on all subjects with me. During the week that I stayed at his house, I had many very pleasant talks with him. He was very much interested in hearing about the new inventions and other wonders of the Western world.” Speer, *The Hakim Sahib, the Foreign Doctor: A Biography of Joseph Plumb Cochran, M. D., of Persia*, 80.

⁸⁴⁶ *Correspondence. Turkey.No. 5/55(1881)*; quoted in: Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, 85.

Despite that fact the raw gold is the same substance that is made into jewelry, it needs refinement to take on luster and value.⁸⁴⁷ To him, the Kurds are a unique ethnic group (*qovm*) in terms of their mastery in art and in their sophistication (*fazl u honar*).⁸⁴⁸ “No one can be as talented as the Kurds if they are properly educated.”⁸⁴⁹ If they were united under one leadership, they would have had a unique state (*bî-maśal va bî-naẓîr*).⁸⁵⁰ Not many details are available about how the Sheikh conceptualized a modern state or what was the scope of his grasp of it. However, he clearly believed in the necessity of a state for the Kurds to become educated, to defend themselves against foreign aggression, and to ensure their internal security and safety.⁸⁵¹

The Kurds under the Gaze of Others

All signs indicate that in the last decades of the 19th century, Kurdistan was experiencing a great deal of unrest and its people had been generally alienated by the central states. The Tanzimat era, noted by Makdisi, introduced an interesting paradox to Ottoman society with far reaching impact. It widened the chasm between the center and periphery. As Makdisi points out:

Beginning with the Tanzimat, Ottoman reformers identified with these subjects as potential fellow citizens with whom they should be united in a newly defined common modern Ottoman patriotism. They also saw them as fellow victims of European intrigue and imperialism. Yet at the same time, they regarded these subjects as backward and as not-yet-Ottoman, as hindrances to as well as objects of imperial reform.⁸⁵²

⁸⁴⁷ (*zar-e dast afshar key bî-tarbiyeh---mîshavad az khak-e ma’dan taşfiyeh*). Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehbab*: 121.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁹ (*gar morabbî mîkonad tarbiye-i an---kordhara dar har honar chun kas madan*). Ibid.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

⁸⁵² Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 770.

This Ottoman elite's new approach to the society not only granted the people a collective status of being brigands, *haydutler*, but also brought enormous violence and a complete disruption of law and order in Kurdistan.⁸⁵³

From the 1860s onward the Ottoman and Qajar states, with the help and pressure of European powers, tried to demarcate the borders between the two Muslim Empires.⁸⁵⁴ Part of this project of border demarcation was involved in population politics and the study of the people ostensibly to make the division between the borderline communities smoother.⁸⁵⁵ The territorial demarcation was to take place for the sake of population control. As Foucault would put it, this region was to go under the control of the "State of population" from that of the "territorial State."⁸⁵⁶ These attempts at reshaping the borderland populace were increasingly turning the Kurds into subjects of these types of studies and political projects. Consequently, it would make them even more prone to stereotypes and subjection to the central states' disciplinary policies. This situation's overall effect on Kurdish economic, cultural and social life was enormous. In cases like that of Hamza Agha⁸⁵⁷ who had a major role in the Sheikh's uprising, the result was

⁸⁵³ Cf. Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh, and state: the social and political structures of Kurdistan*. Also, Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its origins and development*.

⁸⁵⁴ For an extensive study of this subject see, Ateş, "Empires at the Margins: Toward the history of the Ottoman-Iranian borderland peoples, 1843–1881."

⁸⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid*.

⁸⁵⁶ See, Agamben's discussion on this issue in: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer : Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Meridian (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 10-12.

⁸⁵⁷ There is not much written about Hamza Agha. There are some scattered references to his activities in *British Parliamentary Papers* and *Foreign Offices* documents (Cf. Turkey no: 5 & FO: 78/2728) as well as in the Ottoman state records. Based on the above sources the Ottoman had imprisoned Hamza Agha in Istanbul for 15 years. He was the head of Mangours, populated in the vast region between the city of Mahabad, Piranshahr(in the Eastern part of Kurdish region/ Iran) and Pashdar (in the South/Iraq). He was involved in intermittent fight with the Persians (Ateş, 2006, 292). Hamza Agha spoke Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish and Persian languages. He seems to have been the author (signed by him) of a fake pro-Ottoman Friday prayer sermon, in Arabic language, supposedly delivered in Mahabad. In some passages, the sermon rebukes the Kurds and spurs them to rise against the Qajars by calling them out: "O! Kurdish people! How genuine and dependable (*assah*) were your pedigrees; they were audacious, wise, farsighted and broad minded people; and how corrupt (*asqam*) has become their progeny. How misled and ignorant you have become by following the '*Ajams* state and by your avoidance to support the Ottomans [in their past war

decades of hostility and skirmishes with the Qajar State. These studies, which aimed at dividing the Kurds — regardless of their communal ties⁸⁵⁸ just for the sake of managing the population — rendered them as the embodiment of tribalism⁸⁵⁹ and as collective demons.

To come back to Kurdish perceptions and Sheikh Ubeydullah's uprising, the latter was, in a way, a response to this limbo state of being excluded as a part of the deviant periphery and being included in the geographical and disciplinary boundaries of states. This situation unveils the distance between the periphery and center and their mutual perception of their respective "Other." Contextualizing Kurdish perceptions of their "Others" will shed a greater light on the reasons behind the Sheikh's uprising. Generally, in the studies on this uprising, this vitally important factor has been overlooked. It seems that the reason for ignoring this issue stems from the assumption that the Kurds at the time lacked any sense of belonging beyond their tribal affiliation.⁸⁶⁰ Therefore such studies are replete with contradictory arguments in explaining Sheikh Ubeydullah's rising.

A study striving to explain why the Sheikh first revolted against the Qajar state⁸⁶¹ claims

against Russians].”

See: BOA: Dosya No: 2 , Fon Kodu: Y.PRK.EŞK. Tarih: 1298 [1882].

⁸⁵⁸ For more on how these studies were conducted and also how they impacted the borderline communities see: Ateş, "Empires at the Margins: Toward the History of the Ottoman-Iranian Borderland Peoples, 1843-1881."

⁸⁵⁹ Tribalism itself as a concept is a byproduct of centralization and the emergence of modern-nation state. Tribalism is more than a mere reference to the existence of tribes in a community. It is a deontic appellation that legitimates the interference of the modern state to destroy any social structure that it can designate as such. The appellation of tribalism is a way to make a certain collectivity lose its ability of self-representation or to demand any political rights. Tribalism signifies the emergence of modern nation-state that it is content with nothing less than a homogeneous nation. It is a discourse for the obliteration of all the anomalies to the claims of the nation's unitary existence. In it is very core is a byproduct of social Darwinism in action.

⁸⁶⁰ Even in the 16th and 17th century the Kurds were aware of their own ethnic difference with their neighboring communities. See, Martin van Bruinessen fascinating article on this issue Martin van Bruinessen, "Kurdistan in the 16th and 17th Centuries, as Reflected in Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname," *The Journal of Kurdish Studies*, no. 3 (2000).

⁸⁶¹ Actually as mentioned earlier the Sheikh had already revolted against the Ottomans in the previous year, 1879. Cf. *Mulla, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society : Collected Articles*, Analecta Isisiana (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000), 201 & 40.

that “the Ottoman and British Officials convinced the Kurdish leaders to choose Iran instead of the Ottoman territories for their uprising.”⁸⁶² Based on this claim, the Kurds had determined to rise up against the Ottomans — but the Ottomans, along with British officials,⁸⁶³ persuaded them to revolt against the Qajar state instead, as if the Kurds were making a minor change in their plan or in the field of operation for their revolt. Such confusions partly stem from the fact that some of the studies see the uprising from the statist point of view. From the statist perspective, the *prima causa* for any Kurdish political action is always rooted in their manipulability by foreign forces.

In the next few pages, the author of the same study points to a more profound reason or justification for the Sheikh’s commencement of the revolt in the Qajar territories and he notes that “the resistance to injustice and corruption of the Qajar officials can be cited as the primary reason behind the Sheikh’s uprising.”⁸⁶⁴ Again revealing his ideological conviction, just a few pages after this last remark the author once more contradicts himself by stating that “Kurdish nationalism had no role whatsoever in the Sheikh Ubeydullah’s uprising... [However] Kurdish feudalism benefited from the [Qajar] state’s weaknesses and strove to divide Iranian Kurdistan as they were enticed by the Ottoman and British Officials.”⁸⁶⁵

David McDowall and Hakan Özoğlu have also failed to see the Sheikh’s religious self-

⁸⁶² Mujtaba Borzuei, *Avzâ-e Kordestan Az 1258-1325/ the Situation in Kurdistan from 1879 to 1946*, 74.

⁸⁶³ British records clearly show that the British Officials did their best to convince the Ottomans and Persians to take a unified stance against the Kurds. For instance, Earl Granville writes to Mr. Thomson that “her Majesty’s government are glad to learn...that the Persian Government is ready to enter into a formal agreement with the Porte for repressing the incursion of the Kurds inhabiting the Turco-Perian frontier...” *Correspondence. Turkey No. 5/3* (1881). Yet, at the time, as Dr. Cochran sister indicates, the common people generally accepted the rumors that Briton was behind the Sheikh’s uprising. Speer, *The Hakim Sahib, the Foreign Doctor: A Biography of Joseph Plumb Cochran, M. D., of Persia*, 78-90.

⁸⁶⁴ Borzuei, *Avzâ-e Kordestan Az 1258-1325/ the Situation in Kurdistan from 1879 to 1946*, 83.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

differentiation. Therefore, they try to explain the Kurdish revolt by describing it as a mere reaction to Armenian aspirations. McDowall views the Russo-Turkish War as a religious war. He claims that “Sheikh Ubayd Allah had already shown himself willing to help the Sultan⁸⁶⁶ *against the Christian threat.*”⁸⁶⁷ He had been appointed commander of Kurdish tribal forces in the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–78.”⁸⁶⁸ Interestingly enough, in the endnote to the same paragraph McDowall concedes that “In 1878 *Ubayd Allah's influence saved many Christians*”⁸⁶⁹ from massacre in Bayazid and he enjoyed the confidence of the American missionaries in Urumiya.”⁸⁷⁰ McDowall, without citing any specific evidence, calls the Sheikh’s enterprise “a scheme cooked up in Istanbul which offered Sheikh Ubayd Allah undisclosed official sponsorship to form a movement that could act as a counterbalance to the Armenian threat.”⁸⁷¹

McDowall’s account is in contradiction with the Ottoman state’s records. The official records unveil a great deal of concern on the part of the Ottoman state about the possible consequences of the Sheikh’s revolt on the Ottoman side of the borders. A document from the Ottoman Ministry of Defense reports that the Sheikh, with 70,000 armed men under his command, had secured control over the entire region of West Azerbaijan and had declared Kurdish independence. The report predicted that the Persian state would be unable to defeat the

⁸⁶⁶ According to the Russian officer P. I. Averyonov, the Sheikh once said that “if it cannot make a use of them against the Christians in Anatolia, the Palace (*Seray*) will never help the Kurds. The Kurds will have no significance to the Ottoman state if the Christians are wiped out.” Averyanov, *Osmanlı - Rus Ve İran Savaşları'nda Kürtler 1801-1900/ the Kurds in Persian, Ottoman and Russian Wars 1801-1900*, 85.

⁸⁶⁷ Emphasis added.

⁸⁶⁸ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 65.

⁸⁶⁹ Emphasis added.

⁸⁷⁰ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 65.

⁸⁷¹ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 58.

Kurds. “Considering *this event’s enormous impact on our side of the border*,”⁸⁷² stated the report, “local Ottoman officials must immediately take necessary measures and send and collect the required reinforcement, which *must be only composed of Turks and Laz*.”⁸⁷³ Ottoman records also indicate that in order to spur some of the less enthusiastic Ottoman Kurds to the revolt, the Sheikh had spread rumors that the Ottoman state was approving of his revolt against the Qajar State. The Ottomans found those rumors dangerous and believed they had to repudiate the Sheikh’s claim in every possible way.⁸⁷⁴

Furthermore, Celîli Celîl’s work, which is mostly based on Russian archival documents, reveals that the Sheikh turned against the Ottoman state in 1878, when the Empire was still at war with Russia.⁸⁷⁵ This shows that the Sheikh was quickly disillusioned after his first interaction with the Turkish army. Such disillusionment is clearly evident in the Sheikh’s own poetry.⁸⁷⁶ According to the Russian documents, the Sheikh’s efforts against the Ottomans started before the Berlin Treaty (in July 1878).⁸⁷⁷ In 1878, in a meeting with the Russian Consul in Van, one of the Sheikh’s deputies declared that “instead of protecting the life and property of people, the Empire itself has become a fundamental threat to them. Thus, the Sheikh believes that he is morally obliged to protect the people since they consider him as their real protector.”⁸⁷⁸ The

⁸⁷² (*halen bizim tarafe olacak sui tesirati pek büyüktür*). BOA (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*). Dosya No: 5; Gömlek No: 99/2; Fon Kodu: Y.PRK.ASK. 10/21/1880.

⁸⁷³ (*Hic olmaz ise dörder yüze iblağ olunmak uzere kura neferati cedidesinden Laz ve Turk olarak 2500 neferin serian tertipi... ahamiyetiyle rica olunur*). Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴ BOA: Dosya No: 486; Gömlek No: 62; Fon Kodu: A.}MKT.MHM Tarih: 29/Ca/1298 (Hicrî) [28.04.1881]

⁸⁷⁵ Celîl, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri: Kürt Ayaklanması/ 1880 Shaykh Ubeydullah Nehri's Kurdish Uprising*.

⁸⁷⁶ See Nehri, *Tuhfetul Ehab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri*, 104-32.

⁸⁷⁷ Celîl, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri: Kürt Ayaklanması/ 1880 Shaykh Ubeydullah Nehri's Kurdish Uprising*, 110-15.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid.

Sheikh did his best to garner Russian support against the Ottomans. According Celîl, the Sheikh used to say “it is better to stand next to the lion [Russia] instead of waiting behind the fox’s [the British] tail.”⁸⁷⁹

Following a line similar to that of McDowall, Özoğlu claims that “[it] seems that the main reason for the revolt was the *promise*⁸⁸⁰ made to Armenians”⁸⁸¹ as, according to him, Kurdish nationalism had yet to be “created”—Özoğlu claims “that Kurdish nationalism was created at the end of World War I.”⁸⁸² Özoğlu neither makes any claim nor presents any evidence about the Sheikh’s mistreatment of or his antagonism toward Christians during and after the War. However, both Özoğlu and McDowall discount or belittle the Sheikh’s own statements. They also fail to take note of the fact that even before his revolt against the Qajar state in 1880, the Sheikh had revolted against the Ottomans in 1879. The major problem with these types of studies is their inability to hear the dominated voice. There is a tendency to dismiss the non-state actor’s voice as nonsensical. One might argue that this is a general tendency in modern historiography that regards non-state actors’ actions as anomaly or a disturbance to the general flow of history. “A people or a nation lacked history, [Hegel] argued, not because it knew no writing but because lacking as it did in statehood it had nothing to write about.”⁸⁸³ Perhaps this is why McDowall describes the Sheikh’s statements as “such utterances” that in no way

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁰ By “the promise”, Özoğlu means the Article 61 in Berlin Treaty, which reads as follows:
The Sublime Porte engages to realize without further delay, the ameliorations and the reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Kurds and the Circassians. The Sublime Porte will periodically render accounts of the measures taken with this intent to the Powers who will supervise them.

⁸⁸¹ Hakan Özoğlu, “Does Kurdish Nationalism Have a Navel?” in *Symbiotic Antagonisms: Competing Nationalisms in Turkey*, ed. Ayse Kadioglu and Emin Fuat Keyman (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), 203.

⁸⁸² Ibid, 203.

⁸⁸³ Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*(New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 9.

corresponded to the nature of his revolt. Since the revolt did not produce a state, to him, “the revolt bore little evidence that it was anything other than the kind of tribal disturbance, but on a larger scale, that already bedeviled the region.”⁸⁸⁴

It should be kept in mind that perception or “imagination” is a fundamental factor in ethnic and nationalist self-differentiations. Such perceptions could motivate people’s self-differentiations and decouple themselves from their coreligionist on ethnic and linguistic lines, which in turn could shape their religious interpretations. This is where the possibility of religion and nationalism’s fusion becomes visible. The scant literature from the late 19th century shows a great deal of sensitivity on the part of Kurdish *‘ulama*, notables and learned persons to the common stereotypes and to depicting the Kurds as “savages.” As discussed at the outset, the Kurds were concerned that being perceived as such could affect their fate in the political games between the states and the colonial powers.

In 1880, Kurdish leaders from Vilayet-i Kurdistan published a political statement which spoke to their fear of the political consequences of these prevalent negative views of Kurds, among other groups. The Kurdish leaders declared that “we have been stereotyped (*teşhir*) and denigrated in full view of our friends and foes, in every imaginable way.”⁸⁸⁵ They then recounted an event in which a religious figure urged the aid workers who were trying to help the victims of the famine in Kurdistan, not to help the Kurds. It is claimed that this is because the religious leader declared that the Kurds “are savages and rebellious people — let them die from starvation.”⁸⁸⁶ The writers of the statement retort, “is it ethical to *strip an entire community*

⁸⁸⁴ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*: 53.

⁸⁸⁵ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*. (No: 591; Jun 2, 1980).

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

(*kavim*) of their humanity and of their sacred civil rights (*huqûq -ı muqaddese-i medeniye*)?”⁸⁸⁷

There are other documents in which the Kurds express their fear of the possible threat that these kinds of depictions may pose to their political survival. Heeding the documents produced by the states at the time, their fear does not seem without basis. Not only do those documents indicate a somewhat general Kurdish dissatisfaction and political awareness, they also show that the Qajar and Ottoman states were actively trying to depict them as such to legitimize their repressive policies. It is apparent that Kurds were well aware of the state’s policies against them. For instance, the following Persian Foreign Ministry letter to British officials very much validates Kurdish fears of the states’ civilizing discourse that could pose a threat to their very existence and serve to obliterate them:

As their Excellencies the Representatives of the foreign Powers at the Court of Persia have become aware, savage and uncivilized Kurds, such as Abd-el-Kader and Sadeek, the sons of Sheikh Obeidullah, ... accompanied by bad characters as wicked as themselves, have become guilty of acts of aggression such as *are natural to them* on the [Turco-] Persian frontier ... according to secret information received by the Persian Ministers — *some people having no knowledge of the habits of savage clans and tribes and being ignorant of their natural disposition to rapacity and plunder*—have thought that this concentration of the Kurds is a source of injury to the state of this [Kurdish] nation— *it would seem that there are no grounds for suspicions such are entertained by the above-mentioned people*, like the ones to which they have often given vent, and for which they have been thoroughly punished. But now, by taking speedy measures, by the dispatch of troops, and *by energetic steps for obliterating any signs of them, these people will be very soon completely destroyed and the roots of this mischief will be entirely eradicated.*⁸⁸⁸ (Emphasis added)

Now, since these people are savage and they have no political objective and their only motivation is pillaging and ravaging the region, it is expected from the “government of which your Excellency is the Representative will undoubtedly, out of its friendship ... *in no way object to taking any necessary measures [for aid] or to giving its moral support in order to procure the*

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁸ *Correspondence. Turkey No: 5/60* (1881).

*return of peace and tranquility on*⁸⁸⁹ the frontier.”⁸⁹⁰

In the late 19th century, the Kurds constantly expressed that they were disturbed by the Other’s language or “gaze.”⁸⁹¹ Sartre could not be speaking more clearly to this effect when he points out that “[t]he Other’s look touches me across the world and is not only a transformation of myself but a total metamorphosis of the world. I am looked-at in a world which is looked-at.”⁸⁹² The Kurds were becoming increasingly conscious of how they were addressed and of how letting themselves be addressed as such could carry a heavy political cost. This is not to suggest that there were common philosophical reflections among Kurds at the time on the consequences of being looked at or addressed as such. However, amidst their treatment by the dominant groups and nations, they could sense and feel the profound ignominy that was entailed in being addressed as such. This is evidenced in one of Sheikh Ubeydullah’s letters to the governor of Urmia when he says that “there is no nation whose honor has been trampled on as much as the Kurds.”⁸⁹³

The way a collective self⁸⁹⁴ is looked at or addressed, which is essentially related to

⁸⁸⁹ Emphasis added.

⁸⁹⁰ *Correspondence. Turkey No: 5/60 (1881).*

⁸⁹¹ See, Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 340-400. Sartre’s concern is mostly philosophical and individualistic. However, the impact of the Other’s gaze and how it conditions our being could be easily expanded and employed to explain the ways in which a dominant group’s gaze conditions the social existence of the dominated.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*, 360.

⁸⁹³ Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages of the Kurdish Nation’s History*: 42.

⁸⁹⁴ Here I employ C. S. Peirce’s insight about “self”, explained by Singer as:

Peirce’s general theory of signs, or semiotic, as he called it, yields a theory of the self that sees it both as the object and the subject of semiotic systems. From this viewpoint, the locus, unity, and continuity of the self will be found in the systems of signs that constitute the dialogues between utterers and interpreters of the signs. *Personal identity, in this theory, is also a social and cultural identity and is not confined to the individual organism.*

Milton Singer, "Signs of the Self: An Exploration in Semiotic Anthropology," *American Anthropologist, New Series* 82, No. 3 no. 3 (Sep., 1980): 482.(Emphasis added).

mutual perception, is determinative in that collectivity's political stance and action. Being a symbol of ignobility for the Other and its injurious effect may be first felt by elites within a disgraced, oppressed community, as it threatens their own dignifying social status. "Thus the urge on the part of elites to find their own path is more than a matter of concern for their compatriots. It is also a matter of their own dignity."⁸⁹⁵ One's dignity is determined by the nature of the Other's address. In other words, "One comes to "exist" by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other."⁸⁹⁶ If language has such an existential effect on the condition of one's existence or "If language can sustain the body, it can also threaten its existence."⁸⁹⁷ Thus, these 'constitutive language acts' affected Kurdish consciousness and made Kurds aware of their own Kurdishness as it had been identified in a negative light by their Others. Their distinct political collectivity came to be recognized through their Others' negative reference.⁸⁹⁸ That they were "exposed [to themselves and to the Other] at the moment of such a shattering is precisely the volatility of one 'place' within the community of speakers; one can be 'put in one's place, by such speech, but such a place may be no place."⁸⁹⁹

The Eastern/ Persian Kurds' petition, which was written to request that Russia and the other Great Powers intervene and investigate how they have been subjected to all kinds of injustices by both the Qajar and the Ottoman states, shows once more this feeling of psychological and physical exclusion and uprootedness.⁹⁰⁰ As Butler's Hegelian take unveils, the

⁸⁹⁵ Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," 234.

⁸⁹⁶ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York ; London: Routledge, 1997), 5.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁸ Cf. Mesut Yeğen, "The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 2 (2001).

⁸⁹⁹ Butler, *Excitable Speech : A politics of the performative*: 4.

⁹⁰⁰ Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages from Kurdish People's History*, 56.

impact of the injurious language may engender awareness of one's volatile state of existence, of one's unequal socio-political standing and representing difference. The inflected could differentiate oneself from the one who inflects and injures her/him.

In 1880, the Kurdish refugees in Van requested that the Russians dispatch a fact-finding mission to see, in their words, who was “primitive (*bedevi*)”⁹⁰¹ and savage by nature (*vahshi-ul-mazāj*) — the Kurds or those who have taken over Kurdistan by force?”⁹⁰² Now, the Kurds were apparently trying to reproduce and project the same stereotypes onto their Others. Therefore, the petition claims that if a “just power such as Russia” had initiated a due investigation, it would have figured out that the real “savages by nature” are “the occupying states” of Kurdistan, not the Kurds.⁹⁰³ In a context in which the weak is usually stereotyped and perceived as liable, the Kurds are not only trying to create a similar image of their Others but are also declaring themselves as those whose lands were occupied and the occupiers as those who should be considered “uncivilized.” Again, this is a familiar argument, that the embodiment of a certain psychology and a political thinking in which any group or entity depicted as “uncivilized” is automatically stripped of any rights whatsoever.

Aside from the anecdotal aspect of the document, it highlights that from the Kurdish religious leader's perspective, both states represented the same degree of otherness, notwithstanding the states' religious alignments. The last part of this petition is particularly revealing because it not only shows that Kurds had little sympathy for or loyalty to either of the states, it also demonstrates their consciousness of and their disturbance by the common

⁹⁰¹ *Bedevi* is a term commonly used to refer to nomads and nomadic life. However, here it is used along with the word *bedeviyet* to connote primitiveness and savagery.

⁹⁰² *ya anha ke tasahob Kurdistan mikonand*. Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages from Kurdish People's History*, 56.

⁹⁰³ *Ibid.*

stereotypes about them.

It is of no little significance to point out that these leaders saw their hostility to the state entirely in light of ethnic differences. They did not see the states merely as oppressive states, but as imposing oppressive policies on the Kurds due to their putative ethnic differences. The states are referred to as unjust powers that were unleashing their violence against the Kurds as a singular entity, as “a savage group,” — in this way, the states were justifying their harsh policies as falling well within the ambit of the civilizing discourse.

Furthermore, their awareness regarding the common stereotypes associated with Kurdishness seems to have been effective in the formation of Kurdish ethno-nationalist consciousness. A consciousness of “being called a name” by which “one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call.”⁹⁰⁴ This also suggests that at the time, and in some socio-political contexts, ethnic self-differentiation easily overshadowed the common religious bonds among different ethnic groups. Or one’s Islamic bond could not be extended easily beyond one’s ethnic group or nationality. The function and saliency of self-differentiation is context-specific. This was the case with Kurdish participation in Russo-Ottoman War. Although they hated the Russian army more than the Turkish army, they did not hide their abhorrence for the Muslim Ottoman Turks.⁹⁰⁵ The Kurds knew, as discussed below, that they

⁹⁰⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech : A politics of the performative*: 2.

⁹⁰⁵ Sheikh Ubeydullah describes Kurdish-Turkish relation during the War with Russians as follows:

The Romis hatred for the Kurd had no limit/The degree of their jealousy who can relate
Despite that spectacular fight by the *Gazies*/there was no support to come from the *Romîs*
This spineless people (*qovm*) stood behind with guns/made no noise, remained useless their guns
...
I pleaded Fayiq, the commander of the army/give us cannons or bread made from barley
Either gives us cannons to take the enemy’s position/or give us bread to end the fighters’ indecision
He left our fighters to the whimsy of starvation/no bread nor cannons how could they fight in this situation
Many left, enraged by the army’s misdeeds/save the two divisions from my followers and *murids*

were suffering and being humiliated for their ethnic differences. They might have acknowledged that each of the states, at least the Ottoman state, was Muslim as well. They knew that the ruler's religious faith, however, would not deter the state from adopting exclusionary policies. Having a common religion did not help their inclusion. Perhaps when the religious bonds prove ineffective, they are either downplayed or disavowed completely, which was the case in both (1879-80) Sheikh Ubeydullah's and (1925) Sheikh Said's revolts, as revealed in their letters. The Sheikh's threat to excommunicate some high ranking Naqshi 'ulama for their objection to fighting against Persian Muslims clearly speaks to this effect.⁹⁰⁶

As indicated earlier, the aforementioned petition was authored by those who had studied in Kurdish religious schools, the *madrasa* [Arabic/Persian/Turkish, *medrese*, pl. *medâris*]. So it should not come as a surprise that Kurdish religious leaders showed their indifference to the existing Ottoman *Sunni* caliphate since their Islamic views bore the marks of their general ethnic Kurds' attitudes toward the Ottoman state and vice versa. This validates Martin van Bruinessen's claim that the Kurdish religious schools initially gave birth to the idea of Kurdish nationalism.⁹⁰⁷ In his words "not surprisingly it was in the *madrasa* environment, where students from various parts of Kurdistan met and where besides Arabic and Persian the Kurdish language was cultivated, that the idea of a Kurdish "national" identity first emerged."⁹⁰⁸ This unveils the junction of Kurdish and *Sunni-Shafi'i* identity along with the Naqshbandi influence. It is the

Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehab*: 117-19.

⁹⁰⁶ M. Şefik Korkusuz, *Nehri'den Hazne'ye Meşayih Nakşibendi/ from Nehri to Haze Naqshbandi Sheikhs*(Istanbul: Kilim Matbaacılık, 2010), 91.

⁹⁰⁷ Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds and Islam," *Les Annales de l'Autre Islam*, no. 5 (1998, pp. 13-35).

⁹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Kurdishness combined with the *Shafi* 'i-ness that separates them from the dominant Turkish *Hanafi*s as well as the ruling *Shi* 'is in Persia.

The last part of this petition also indicates that the Kurds were concerned that the Qajars and Ottomans have been successful in depicting the Kurds as savages. They are not oblivious to the fact that the prevalence of the negative perception about the Kurds may have enabled the states to continue “their indiscriminate killings in Kurdistan.”⁹⁰⁹ What is interesting is how the prevalence of these views is presumed in the available literature, notwithstanding its paucity. Sheikh Ubeydullah also reasserts the same views and blames the Ottoman and Persian states for the omnipresence of this negativity about the Kurds. As indicated earlier, he wrote that “[t]he Kurdish nation...is known among all nations as mischievous and corrupt. This is how Kurdistan has been depicted. If one person (from among them) does an evil deed, a thousand peaceable and orderly people gain ill repute.” Just like the signatories of the aforementioned petition, the Sheikh also views this issue as more than a mere cultural or ethnocentric matter. He too opines that it is a political issue. Therefore he contends that “for certain... this has all been caused by the negligence of the Turkish and Persian authorities, for Kurdistan is in the midst between the two countries, and both Governments, for their own reasons, do not distinguish between good and evil character.”⁹¹⁰

It is hard to know what the Sheikh's views were about the states, particularly the Ottoman state, before the War of 1887–88. It seems, however, that the Russo-Ottoman War was instrumental in affording him a new perspective on the Ottomans as he personally witnesses their treatment of the Kurds. If the Sheikh previously held positive views about the Ottoman state, this

⁹⁰⁹ Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages of the Kurdish Nation's History*: 56.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid.

had to change completely after his personal interaction with the Ottomans during the War. This much can be inferred from his account of his experiences in the War. The available historical account offers little about the Sheikh's perception of the Ottoman Turks.⁹¹¹ Ali Afshar, who wrote his own account of the war against⁹¹² Ubeydullah in 1880, asserts that the Sheikh's plan for the rebellion could be traced back to five years earlier.⁹¹³ He believes that the Sheikh had a plan for occupying Persia even before the Russo-Ottoman War. Afshar claims that the Sheikh was planning to conquer Persia in its entirety and to convert the Persians to *Sunnism*, exactly the way Shah Ismail had converted them to *Shi'ism* in the 16th century.⁹¹⁴ Afshar also claims that the Sheikh had notified the Kurds that he had seen his father Seyyed Taha in his dreams, telling the Sheikh to destroy the Qajar dynasty and *Shi'ism*, to "spread Islamic law (*Shari'a*) and establish a just rule in Persia."⁹¹⁵ Then, Afshar describes the event as follows:

After hearing this announcement, the ill-natured Kurds (*bad-bonyād*) gathered around the second son of Ubeydullah Ibn-i Ziyad.⁹¹⁶ Five years earlier, with the hope of

⁹¹¹ In 1880, Dr. Cochran reports that the Sheikh

has seemed disposed for some years past to get into closer relations with us and the civilized world. He regards the *Turks and Persians as deceptive people, not living up to their religion*, and altogether too depraved to hope that they will ever again hold the position they once commanded among the other nations. Regarding them in the light that he does, and situated as he is between them, he wishes to have the moral, if not material, support of a better people and government. To this end, he has several times sent to us, asking that we put him in a way of getting such help from the British government. Last year [1879] before entering on a campaign against the Turks, to whom he had up to that time paid tribute, he sent confidential agents to us repeating this request (Speer, *The Hakim Sahib, the Foreign Doctor: A Biography of Joseph Plumb Cochran, M. D., of Persia*, 75.)

⁹¹² Afshar personally participated in the war, against the Sheikh. See his account: Afshar, *Tarikh-E Khruj Akrad Va Qatl Va Gharat-E Ubeydullah-E Badbonyad Va Eghteshash Va Fitnay-E Ziyad Dar Mamlakat-E Azarbayjan, 1297/ the Kurdish Rebellion: The Ill-Natured Ubeydullah's Massacres and Pillage in 1880.*

⁹¹³ Ibid.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid., 22 & 219.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid., 24 & 220.

⁹¹⁶ The author here likens the Sheikh to Ubeydullah Ibn-i Ziyad who was one of the perpetrators in the killing of Hussein, the Third *Shi'i Imam* and the grandson of the Prophet of Islam.

becoming a ruler this ignoramus Sheikh declared himself the king of the tribes (*Sulṭan al-‘ashâ’er*) and that he had ever since then been making preparations and collecting weapons for an arsenal.⁹¹⁷

In his *Mesnewi* Sheikh Ubeydullah gives a full account of his participation in the Russo-Ottoman War. Here, the anecdotal aspect of the Sheikh’s writing is not a matter of much concern. The most significant issue is to see how the Sheikh’s account reproduces the mutual Kurdish-Ottoman perception during the War, which was evidently the first direct Kurdish-Ottoman elite’s interaction on a large scale. What is important here is to see to what extent Kurdish ethnicity, Kurdish Islam, and other distinguishing characteristics become an issue during this interaction. It is also important to find out to what extent this experience played a role in the Sheikh’s ensuing political actions and statements.

It should be noted that it is not possible to speculate on the Sheikh’s views on Ottoman state and society before the War based on these poems.⁹¹⁸ Those parts of his poetry in which political issues are talked about were written in the post-War era. Therefore, his views are entirely expressed in retrospect and reflect the impact of his experiences during the War.

The Sheikh dedicates over four hundred couplets of his poems to the story of Kurdish participation in the Russo-Ottoman War, under his own leadership. In this poetry book, the Sheikh attends to political issues with some degrees of hesitation since, he informs us, that book is strictly about religious matters. It is supposedly an instruction for the revival of Islam in

⁹¹⁷ Afshar, *Tarikh-E Khruj Akrad Va Qatl Va Gharat-E Ubeydullah-E Badbonyad Va Eghteshash Va Fitnay-E Ziyad Dar Mamlakat-E Azarbayjan, 1297/ the Kurdish Rebellion: The Ill-Natured Ubeydullah’s Massacres and Pillage in 1880.*, 24 & 220.

⁹¹⁸ Celîl Celîl claims that during the War the Sheikh had some political plans. Yet, the Sheikh himself indicates that, at least initially, he had joined the *jihad* against the Russians since they “out of sheer arrogance had attacked the Muslim land and were trying to annex it to that of their own.” Also, Bruinessen’s writings imply that the Sheikh was not much active politically before the Russo-Ottoman War. Bruinessen points out that the War “spurred [the Sheikh] on to political activism.” See, Celîl, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri: Kürt ayaklanması/ 1880 Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehri’s Kurdish Uprising*: 41.; Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehabab*: 114.; and Bruinessen, *Mulla, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society : Collected Articles*, 201.

Kurdistan, with a clear Naqshbandi bent.⁹¹⁹ Whenever there is a discussion about worldly matters (*aḥvâl-e donyâ*), claims the Sheikh, it is hardly void of ill intent. However, “I discuss such issues to tell the story of the Kurds and the *Romîs* [Ottoman Turks].”⁹²⁰ “I could be accused,” he states, for backbiting, which is one of the gravest sins.⁹²¹ However, “the *mazlûm* (the oppressed or the subject of injustice) has the right to talk about the oppressor (*ẓâlem*), especially if what s/he says is identical to what actually happened (*tebq-e mājara*).”⁹²² The Sheikh further explains his intention for relating his experience during the War, in the last two couplets of his poem (on this story) as he writes, “it is for the sake of the beloved (*vidâd*) Kurds that I allowed my pen to suffer, write, and [for their story] to be inscribed on the pages of time (*ruẓgar*) to become a memory (*yadgar*) for the world (*°alam*).”⁹²³

The Sheikh offers a detailed account of his preparation regarding the number of fighters whom he could gather, the nature of his interaction with the Ottoman army and the reasons for the Ottoman Army’s defeat. This provides us a window on the Sheikh’s thinking about the Ottoman state, the Kurds and his revivalist and ethno-nationalistic tendencies. His strict personal religious devotion comes to light as he recounts his preparation for the War. He claims that he had seen the Prophet of Islam in his dream, giving him a flag. When he goes to Gewer,⁹²⁴ a town close to his residence, he is informed that such a flag existed and a family that had preserved it

⁹¹⁹ See, Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehabab*: 126.

⁹²⁰ Ibid.

⁹²¹ Ibid.

⁹²² Ibid.

⁹²³ Ibid., 127.

⁹²⁴ The town’s name is Turkified and now it is called Yüksekova.

from the time of the ‘Abbasids willingly gave it to the Sheikh.⁹²⁵ Apparently, he bears the same flag when joins the Ottoman Army to fight the Russians.⁹²⁶

Ubeydullah seems convinced that all the calamities that had befallen the Ottoman Empire were the direct result of what he viewed as the cultural and moral degeneration of the state and its subjects. Thus, he retorts that “how can there be a victory (*nusrat*) when there are no faithful (*mu'min*).”⁹²⁷ To him, the Ottomans (*Romîs*) had lost their moral compass and this was why they had sustained such a humiliating defeat at the hands of Russians.⁹²⁸ He sees a direct correlation between the degree of people’s religious devotion and their worldly failings and triumphs. It should be remembered that such an attitude was not uncommon among the 19th and 20th century revivalists.⁹²⁹ That being said, however, the Sheikh did not believe that the whole community had become degenerate in the same way or had strayed to the same extent from the straight path. He clearly believed there were different attitudes toward Islam and morality between different ethnic groups. He was of the opinion that the Ottomans (*Romîs*), notwithstanding their greater

⁹²⁵ This is how the Sheikh describes his venture into the War:

It was a blessing from God to learn that such a flag had remained from the time of Bani Abbas. This news made me happy to an extent that it could not be described in words... All of us were crying uncontrollably as we saw the flag. Except for crying who could react to the impact of such a scene... When I saw the flag it was the exact same one I had seen in my dream, in the hands of the Prophet. As if an angel was whispering in my ear: this is the interpretation of your dream. Now, I was certain that I had received a gift from the crown of the universe [Muhammad]... I returned to my residence with an unimaginable degree of happiness. So, I gave hundred coins of gold to the poor and indigents... all this was nothing but a clear sign of the awaiting victory. Ibid., 113–14.

⁹²⁶ Afshar mockingly recounts this event. He states that the Sheikh had “declared *jihad*; along with 30,000 Kurds all had in their hands flags and drums and marching toward Kars... the Ottoman commanders received the Sheikh with an utmost reverence... They via a telegraph communicated this infidel’s presence with his majesty the Ottoman Sultan, the mightiest of all.” Afshar, *Tarikh-e Khoruj-e Akrâd va Qatl va Gharât-e ‘Ubeydullah-e Bad-bonyad va Eghteshâsh va Fitna-i Ziyâd dar Mamlakat-e Azarbayjan, 1297/ The Kurdish Rebellion: The ill-Natured Ubeydullah’s Massacres and Pillage in 1880.*: 24-25 & 220.

⁹²⁷ Nehri, *Tuhfetul Ehbab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri*, 109.

⁹²⁸ There can’t be a victory without faith--- how something can be if the conditions for its existence are not? Ibid.

⁹²⁹ See for example S. Qutb’s introduction to Abu al-Hassan al-Nadawi, *Madha Khasare al- ‘Alim bi InHitati al-Mulismiin/ Muslim Degeneration and the World’s Loss* (Cairo: al-Iman, 1945), especially, pp. 10-11.

numbers, had surrendered their lands.⁹³⁰ They did so because they were too corrupt to stand their ground against the Russians' incursion.⁹³¹ To the Sheikh, the Ottoman defeat more than anything else was indicative of their moral failure. "The Muslims are controlled by thugs,"⁹³² he said. The Sheikh was especially harsh on the army and the bureaucrats. He had no problem calling them irreligious (*bî-dîn*).

During the fights, from the Sheikh's perspective, the Ottoman side was composed of two opposing groups: The *Romîs* (Ottoman Turks), a morally lax group; and the poised Kurds, who had strong religious convictions.⁹³³ The Kurds were portrayed as devoted religious people, from among whom he had assembled tens of thousands⁹³⁴ of fighters as he called on them to join the *jihad* against the Russians' invasion. According to the Sheikh, the Kurds were the only force who actually engaged in fights. After the Kurds' arrival and as result of their outstanding fight the Russian army sustained many humiliating defeats, one after another. The details and the nature of the fights are explained diligently and the fighters' motivation is linked to their ethnicity and religious devotion. Hence, the Sheikh describes the Kurds' role in the war as follows:

When in Abgha⁹³⁵ our fighters faced the Russians
 The Russians sustained a mortifying defeat
 The Kurds, just like roaring lions in the fight;
 The Russians, like deer seeking a way out of sight
 The Kurds' thunderous roars turned them into a [formless] cloud
 Down the plains streamed Russian blood,
 Russian heads, like hail began to fall
 For our lions, even mountains were too small

⁹³⁰ *Kardash taslim bedun karzar. Nehri, Tuhfetul Ehbab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri, 114.*

⁹³¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁹³² *Ibid.*, 111. The affairs of this great *umma* are now in the hands of thugs and oppressors (*ikhtiyar-e kar-e khair al-omam--- dar kaf'ashar o abnay zalam*)

⁹³³ *Ibid.*, 117-23.

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁹³⁵ A place near the city of Van, in Northern Kurdistan/ Turkey

The bright glint of Kurdish swords
 Flashing like lighting, indescribable in words
 The enemy forces falling as they sought safe haven
 Kurdish roars echoed up to highest heaven
 The [Kurdish] *Gazis*⁹³⁶ roars and shouts
 With the Russians' fears and self-doubts
 And the Russians' bodiless souls filled the air
 For their soulless bodies turned red everywhere
 As the Russians' cries reached the sky
 Angels praising the *Gazis* from on high⁹³⁷

The Sheikh claims that the “*Romîs*” (the Ottoman Turks) would have been unwilling to fight — even if a soldier of theirs had dared to join the Kurds⁹³⁸ to fight against the Russians, he would have been severely punished by his superior upon sight. Hence:

One of [the Ottoman] soldiers, brave and upright
 Having joined us during the Kurdo-Russian fight,
 Was beaten with a stick, gravely punished
 Lost his food ration, his honor tarnished
 His sin unforgivable and so grave
 Having joined the Kurds, so was he brave⁹³⁹

The Ottoman role is mostly seen as a destructive one. The impression they left on the Kurds was that they were full of hate for the Kurds. The Sheikh sees the “*Romîs*” as those who did nothing but squander the Kurds' support and energy. He states that the Ottoman army and its commanders awarded the Kurds' bravery and sacrifice with hatred, mockery, jealousy and by cutting their food rations. So,

Despite that spectacular fight by the *Gazis* (the Kurds),
 There was no support to come from the *Romîs* (the Turks)⁹⁴⁰
 ...

⁹³⁶ *Ghazi* is someone who fights in the cause of religion. However, here the Sheikh uses the term exclusively for the Kurdish fighters who fought along the Ottomans during the Russo-Ottoman War in 1877-78.

⁹³⁷ Nehri, *Mesnewi Şeyx Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehab*: 116.

⁹³⁸ According to Celîl, the Kurds were unwilling to fight alongside the Turks, and this was the cause of constant frictions between the two groups. See; Celîl, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri: Kürt ayaklanması/ 1880 Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehri's Kurdish Uprising*: 43.

⁹³⁹ Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehab*: 117.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid.

The reinforcements [the Kurds] alone defeated the enemy
[Turkish] commanders awarded them with hatred and envy
They tried to get rid of the Kurds and cut their food rations
Days passed without bread, the fighters lost their patience⁹⁴¹

...
The *Romîs* hatred for the Kurds had no limit
The degree of their jealousy who can relate⁹⁴²

To the Sheikh, the *Romîs* represented all that was wrong with the Muslim world. He sees them as the classic example of Muslim degeneration, “vile (*sofle*h), lacking a heartfelt religion, and wolves disguised as shepherds.”⁹⁴³ The Turkish army’s mockery and ridicule of the Kurds, who are described by the Sheikh as being of the *qawm-e pak dîn* (the people of the true religion), makes them leave the battle field. Despite that fact the Ottoman army had promised to provide the Kurds with food and other logistical supplies, amidst the fighting they cut even food rations for the Kurds.⁹⁴⁴ To the Sheikh, all these were signs of Ottoman hostility toward the Kurds, who had shown a great deal of bravery and a superior morality. The Sheikh reports that the Kurds left the Ottomans for 40⁹⁴⁵ days and the Ottomans lacked the guts to make any brave move at all to attack the Russians even once.⁹⁴⁶ When the Kurds responded to the Sheikh’s call, as he himself claims, they recorded one victory after another until they captured the city of Yerevan:

⁹⁴¹ Ibid.

⁹⁴² Ibid., 119.

⁹⁴³ *Az gorgan, ra ‘i pustin.*

⁹⁴⁴ Celîl also points to the correspondence between army commanders, Faik Pasha and Ahmat Muhtar Pasha, with regard to Sheikh Ubeydullah’s fighters and their lack of food and other logistics. Although, the Sheikh believed that the Ottoman Turks intentionally ignored the Kurdish fighters’ needs, Celîl’s account shows that the Ottoman army was in terrible shape and most likely they were unable to attend to the irregular (Kurdish) forces’ basic needs. See; Celîl, *1880 Şeyh Ubeydullah Nehri: Kürt ayaklanması/ 1880 Sheikh Ubeydullah Nehri’s Kurdish Uprising*: 42-43.

⁹⁴⁵ The valley of Zangzor has become a riddle — for forty days the army was stuck [there] (*Vađi hayrat shodeh Zangzor — arba ‘inî lashkar mând az ‘obûr*); with the Kurdish presence, this huge group of army dared not make any bold move (*jor ‘atî namad az an qawm-e kaşîr --- ke konad bî-Kord da ‘va-ye dalîr*) Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehbab*: 123.

⁹⁴⁶ According to the Sheikh, the Ottoman commanders once again asked him to call on the Kurds to join the fight. So for the second the Kurds responded to his call. Once more they inflicted a great defeat on the Russian. Their victory

The Kurds once again proved their gallantry
 Just as lions cannot satiate [their hunger] without victory
 as these lions faced the enemy again toe to toe
 the Russians started fleeing, confused where to go
 ...
 The Russians sustained another humiliating defeat
 the Kurds destroyed their last shred of dignity, indeed
 ...
 no days could pass without a Kurdish victory
 no days would pass without another display of bravery⁹⁴⁷

According to the Sheikh, the Kurds, however, once again faced the hostility and mockery of the *Romîs*. They were not credited for what they did. Moreover, the *Romîs* did not hesitate to rub salt into the Kurds' wounds.⁹⁴⁸ The Kurds, according to the Sheikh, had lost nine hundred fighters, while the Ottomans had lost none. Despite this, it was the Kurds who were being mocked and insulted for sustaining the loss.⁹⁴⁹

The Sheikh certainly is much more bitter in narrating Kurdish-Ottoman interactions during the War. To the Sheikh, the Ottoman Turks were just nominal Muslims. Deep down, in their heart, they lacked much religious feelings. He contends that the Ottomans or *Romîs*, as he calls them, were *münafiq*, lacking any real faith, while pretending to be Muslims. He recounts a *ḥadīth*, attributed to the Prophet of Islam, of whose content the Sheikh believes the Ottomans' religiosity to be the embodiment.⁹⁵⁰ According to this *ḥadīth*, the Prophet declared that there

resulted in capturing the city of Yerevan. Only after the Kurds captured Yerevan and cleared it from the Russian army, the Ottoman army entered the city. The army was jubilant and declared that they were the ones who had captured Yerevan. They, at all, did not credit the Kurds for the victory. During the operation, the Kurds lost 9 hundred fighters among whom were 6 religious scholars and Naqshbandi caliphs and the *Romîs* sustained no loss whatsoever. Yet, they continued mocking the Kurds. The "Cockled [Ismail] Pasha sarcastically shouted at me: O! Sheikh no one fights like you Kurds! You have lost 9 hundred men and I have come all the way from *Erzurum* and lost only three solders." Ibid., 121–24.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid., 119.

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid., 121–24.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 121–24.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., 109 & 27.

were three criteria by which one can tell if a person is a *münafiq*: a) if he tells untruth as he speaks b) if he breaks whatever promise he makes c) if he deceives whenever he is trusted.⁹⁵¹

Then the Sheikh goes on to explain how he feels about the Ottomans:

No matter how much I say about their injustices, it would not be more than a tiny bit of what actually took place. The *Romîs* dishonored every single promise they made to us at the beginning of the War. They squandered all that we had done for them. They promised to take care of the Kurdish fighters' food rations and they broke their promise...The *Romîs*' actions rendered all the Kurdish sacrifice to be in vain.⁹⁵²

While the Ottomans' religiosity is painted by the Sheikh as almost non-existent, pretentious, and not heartfelt, the Kurdish religiosity just like their "bravery is unmatched." Only the Arabs' bravery and piety was equivalent to that of Kurds, according to the Sheikh.⁹⁵³

They are born with natural sagacity⁹⁵⁴
They are lions, symbols of bravery
Epitomes of heroism in warfare
They are Hatams,⁹⁵⁵ icons of generosity
"d" in Kurd stands for *dîn* (religiosity)
"k" stands for *kamâl* and perfection
"r" for *rushd*, spiritual maturation
Only in Kurds can you find⁹⁵⁶
All these virtues combined⁹⁵⁷

This very stratification of people's religiosity based on their ethnicity unveils the fusion of religion and ethno-nationalism, which in turn reflects the difference between the periphery and the center in their take of Islam. The Sheikh's portrayal of the two communities — the "*Romîs*"

⁹⁵¹ °*Alamātul munāfiqi thalāthatuḥ*: 'idhā ḥadatha kadhiba, wa 'idhā wa'ada 'akhlāfa, wa idh[ā] 'utmi'una khāna.

⁹⁵² Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehab*: 127.

⁹⁵³ Ibid., 121. This is not uncommon for the Kurds to claim that they have common origin with Arabs. Even Said Nursi had a similar claim. These views, however, change among the Kurds as they face Arab nationalism; especially after the creation of Iraq.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ke fatanat ra ze kordan shood asas.*

⁹⁵⁵ Hatam Taei, the symbol of generosity in Arabic literature and culture.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ke nadarad hich aqwam-e degar.*

⁹⁵⁷ Nehri, *Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri; Tuhfetul Ehab*.

and the Kurds — as two distinct groups of people could not be any clearer. The “us” versus “them” dichotomy is defined in both religious and ethno-nationalistic terms. As shown in the foregoing chapter, the Ottomans too were generally suspicious of the nature of peripheral Islam. So was the periphery’s perception of the center’s brand of Islam. The Kurdish reaction to the center’s religiosity as suspicious, contaminated, and inauthentic is repeatedly expressed even by people like Sa’id Nursi, as shown in the following chapter. Simultaneously, the subtexts of these claims to purity, superiority or authenticity of the interpretations were connected to each group’s claim to some sort of ethnic or cultural superiority. Hence, the religious understanding and devotion of the ‘in-group’ is celebrated and that of the ‘out-group’ is condemned or its authenticity is strongly questioned. As shown above, the Sheikh claims that the Kurds’ “superior qualities should not surprise anyone” and he connects this to their “noble origin,” supposedly from the same stock as “the noble Arabs.”⁹⁵⁸ These “unique qualities” were evidently related to their community origins. Was as much true of their “true” and “sincere” practice of Islam?

The purpose of rendering these outright claims to the Kurds ethnic supremacy by the Sheikh is to demonstrate the malleability of religious interpretation that allows for a smooth elision of nationalist and ethnic discourses. This is again contrary to what is not infrequently held views,⁹⁵⁹ is indicative of the susceptibility of religion to be interpreted locally. The general resistance to the possibility of nationalist discourses spilling over into religious understanding stems from the belief in the idea of religion’s inability to trespass into the modern world when nationalism comes into being. Remarks like “It is not only possible but also probable that

⁹⁵⁸ Bediüzzaman Nursi likewise claimed that Kurds shared a common ancestry with “the noble Arab race”. Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 579.

⁹⁵⁹ For instance, Coakley claims that “unlike nationalism, the great religions are universalistic...” See: Coakley, “Religion and Nationalism in the First World,” 213.

Ubeydullah, a Naqshbandi sheikh, did not know the explosive meaning of the word ‘nation’⁹⁶⁰ at best constitute an exaggerated belief in the unbridgeable gulf between nationalism and religion (or Islam in our case).

It is evident that even theoreticians of nationalism are not immune to the affect of this Manichean belief in the constancy of the space between nationalism and religion. As noted before, for instance, Greenfeld contends that “nationalism thus has been also the framework of the modern social consciousness. It was religion, by contrast, that formed the framework of social consciousness in the premodern world; nationalism has replaced religion as the main cultural mechanism of social integration.”⁹⁶¹ Setting aside the fact that such a metaphysical take on consciousness as a pure and unmediated unitary thing is untenable, seeing the “premodern” world as a universe of the religion agent⁹⁶² verses the “modern” universe in which the religious agent is absent, is blatantly Manichean, not to mention teleological. Considering the fact that Greenfeld simultaneously acknowledges that “religion was a crucial factor in the development of nationalism ... [or] it played midwife at the birth of nationalism and protected it in its infancy...”⁹⁶³ the above views become particularly problematic. However, she goes a step further and cites a number of important cases in which, according to her, religion shaped and framed national consciousness. For instance, she maintains that “Pietism, was responsible for the conceptual and emotional framework of German national consciousness.”⁹⁶⁴ So if this uninterrupted dichotomy between religion and nationalism is seen as an ‘inert fact of nature’,

⁹⁶⁰ Özoglu, "Does Kurdish Nationalism Have a Navel?," 214.

⁹⁶¹ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on modern culture* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 95.

⁹⁶² See, Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on Modern Culture*, 95.

⁹⁶³ Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on modern culture*: 104.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid.

how can religion be both the sole framework of pre-modern social consciousness and have also framed German national consciousness—supposedly “essentially secular”?

It seems there are two reasons for these types of contradictions: a) a rigid distinction between modernity and pre-modernity⁹⁶⁵ and b) a narrow and a Europe-centered definition of religion. It is apparent that Greenfeld similarly has a very narrow and Protestant-centered definition of religion, which in modern times has lost its power to the state—another claimant of the “absolute truth.”⁹⁶⁶ It must be emphasized, however, that such a reading of Christianity too solidifies this religion in *one* phase of its historical development. Not only are all of its possible historical changes arrested, it is furthermore presumed that this dualistic religious view of life, one being under “[t]he Kingdom of the Lord [that] was not of this world, and ... [the other under] kingdoms of this”⁹⁶⁷ world, is part and parcel of all “the great religions.”⁹⁶⁸

Here the genius of Chatterjee’s approach becomes evident when he contends that the colonial world’s nationalism is derivative in nature and not a copy of its Other.⁹⁶⁹ This derivativeness signifies the non-universal content of nationalism. This lends nationalism a capability to emerge in various local forms that make it open to the adaptation of regional mores, cultures, and religious interpretations. As noted before, Chatterjee explains this when he critiques Benedict Anderson for his claim with regard to the existence of a type of universal “modularity” for nationalism. Chatterjee rejects this notion of universality since “nationalism declares the

⁹⁶⁵ For an interesting critique of this approach see: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (New York ; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

⁹⁶⁶ Greenfeld, *Nationalism and the Mind: Essays on modern culture*: 98.

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁸ This phrase is repeatedly used by Greenfield. For a great study of such classifications of religions see, Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*.

⁹⁶⁹ See, Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*.

domain of the spiritual [as] its sovereign territory and refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain.”⁹⁷⁰ This very domain to which the “Other” is denied access contains the nation’s language, culture, and religion that is being reinterpreted and reformed,⁹⁷¹ not discarded, by nationalists.

The greater “need to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture”⁹⁷² while deeming it susceptible to reform and reinterpretation may in many ways resemble other types of religious interpretations that exhibit both signs of continuity and context-specificity. The changes and continuities entailed by nationalist discourse, based on the limit and scope of such reforms, may be called a new interpretation of religion or some type of secular reform.

To conclude this section with an example that substantiates this claim regarding the interpretability of religion, one could refer to Iqbal, the renowned Muslim philosopher’s take on the transformations in the Turkish political system during the 1920s, which he considers a significant event in “the history and working of *Ijtihād* in modern Islam.”⁹⁷³ He even goes as step further and states that

[t]he point of supreme interest with the Nationalist Party is above all the State and not Religion. With these thinkers religion as such has no independent function. The state is the essential factor in national life which determines the character and function of all other factors. They, therefore, reject old ideas about the function of State and Religion, and accentuate the separation of Church and State. Now the structure of *Islam as a religio-political system, no doubt, does permit such a view*, though personally I think it is a mistake to suppose that the idea of state is more dominant and rules all other ideas embodied in the system of Islam.⁹⁷⁴ (Emphasis added)

⁹⁷⁰ *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, 5.

⁹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5-13.

⁹⁷² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁷³ Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Certainly, Iqbal does not represent all his coreligionists. Of course, no one does. However, this is exactly what makes any universal claim to religious interpretation unfounded, secular claims included. The inclusion⁹⁷⁵ of the reinterpretations of regional mores and religions, which constitutes the defining elements for the alternative modernities, creates a possible context for the fusion of religion and nationalism. Or as Asad puts it, “[t]he legitimate entry of religion into the debates results in the creation of modern ‘hybrids’: the principle of structural differentiation—according to which religion [is] located in autonomous social space no longer holds.”⁹⁷⁶

“The Kurdish Nation is a people apart”⁹⁷⁷

Having discussed the influence of ethnic differences on Sheikh Ubeydullah’s perception of the “Other” and similarly on his revivalism, we shall now take up the declarative aspect of the Sheikh’s political statements. To borrow Judith Butler’s phraseology, in what kind of politics of the performative was the Sheikh involved?⁹⁷⁸ What did the Sheikh declare with his statements? What did he do with the words he used? Can any sense be made of his words? Did the declarative aspect of his revolt exhibit any novelty compared to previous Kurdish uprisings? What if his statements sound anomalous to commonly held views about the socio-cultural

⁹⁷⁵ Iqbal defends the historical experience of the Muslims and believes that the spirit of their religion justifies “liberal Muslim’s attempts” to rethink their religious thought in its entirety, of course without complete abandonment of their past. Thus, he asserts that “the spirit of Islam is so broad that it is practically boundless. With the exception of atheistic ideas alone it has assimilated all the attainable ideas of surrounding peoples, and given them its own peculiar direction of development.” Ibid.

⁹⁷⁶ Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 183.

⁹⁷⁷ Sheikh Ubeydullah’s letter to Dr. Cochran. *Correspondence. Turkey. Incl. 3. No. 5/61* (1881).

⁹⁷⁸ See Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*.

context of his revolt? Can his statements be utilized to revisit the revolt or can they be ignored?

As mentioned above, some historians have raised questions as to whether the Sheikh was a nationalist. Özoğlu, for instance, denies the possibility that the Sheikh's revolt was informed by nationalist motives when he states that "the question of the intended meaning of the phrase 'Kurdish nation'⁹⁷⁹ immediately arises. Unfortunately, we do not know what word, the Sheikh used that was rendered as 'nation' by the translators or possibly by Cochran himself."⁹⁸⁰ Özoğlu implies that Sheikh Ubeydullah might not have used the word nation⁹⁸¹ and that the translator may have interpreted another Persian⁹⁸² word that might not be this word's equivalent. Although this could be an important observation, the context of the use of this word renders the choice of its Persian equivalent insignificant. Whether the Sheikh used *qowm* (Persian for ethnic group) or *mellat* (nation) is not perhaps even salient, given the lengths to which he finally committed himself when he declared that "the Kurds are a people apart" from others, not merely in terms of their language and costume, but even in terms of *their religion*.

⁹⁷⁹ It should be noted that along with the abovementioned point, Özoğlu makes some other claims. He states that the Sheikh's could not understand the "explosive meaning" of the word 'nation.' Nonetheless, he admits that, at least, "other primary sources contain confusing, if not contradictory, evidence about the nature of Ubeydullah's secessionist aim" (214). On the next page, Özoğlu refers to the Sheikh's use of "the vocabulary of contemporary European nationalism" — again, not with the aim of creating an independent state, but "probably [for] the resurrection of an autonomous principality as these had existed before the extension of administration under the Ottoman *Tanzîmât*." Özoğlu, "Does Kurdish Nationalism Have a Navel?" 214–15.

⁹⁸⁰ Hakan Özoğlu, "Does Kurdish Nationalism Have a Navel?" in *Symbiotic Antagonisms: Competing Nationalisms in Turkey*, ed. Ayse Kadioglu and Emin Fuat Keyman (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), 203.

⁹⁸¹ *Mellat* is a Persian word for nation. I assume that the Sheikh wrote his letter in Persian since at the time Persian and Arabic were the *linguae francae* of the Kurds. The Sheikh in addition to Kurdish and Persian must have known Ottoman Turkish (a number of his letters in Ottoman are available in the Ottoman archives) and Arabic. Cochran describes him as "a man well read in Persian and Arabic literature. He has also read most of the Bible we sent him last year" (quoted in Speer, *The Hakim Sahib*, 78). However, except for his *Masnavi* in Persian and a few Ottoman letters, it is hard to know whether he has left anything else behind, especially in Kurdish. According to Afshar, during his attack on Urmia, the Sheikh was reciting Kurdish poems to spur his followers on. See Afshar, *Tarikh-e Khoruj Akrâd va Qatl va Gharat-e Ubeydullah-e Bad-bonyâd va Eghteshash va Fitnâ-i Ziyâd dar Mamlakat-e Âzarbayjan, 1297/ The Kurdish Rebellion: The ill-Natured Ubeydullah's Massacres and Pillage in Azerbaijan, 1880*, 130.

⁹⁸² The Sheikh writes his famous letters to the non-Turkish foreign officials in Persian.

Furthermore, the primary documents produced by Kurds, in Persian and Ottoman languages, testify to the use of the word ‘nation’ in its modern sense. For instance, in Ottoman papers from the 1880s Kurdish intellectuals did not hesitate to call the Kurds a ‘nation.’ Actually, some did so in a hyperbolic fashion, claiming that even nomadic Kurds had a unique thirst for knowledge and that in the pursuit of knowledge “no other *nation* has arrived at such an honorable stage.”⁹⁸³ Similar statements exist in Persian documents produced by Kurds.⁹⁸⁴

By carefully analyzing what Sheikh Ubeydullah had to say about Kurds, Turks, and Persians, and in particular by looking at which characteristics he portrayed more positively and negatively to ascertain which aspects he wished to incorporate, change, or discard into revivalism, we can trace a distinct outline of how he saw Kurds vis-à-vis various Others. This analysis can lead to surprising discoveries about what he saw, how he interpreted it, and what cultural and religio-political motivations may have been driving him to express those particular views at those particular times and in those particular contexts. We can thus obtain a picture of the possible reasons why he thought the way he did.

The best way to determine what the Sheikh might have meant is to look at how he used the phrase ‘Kurdish people’ in a variety of different contexts. The Sheikh wrote many letters,

⁹⁸³ *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* (No.592; June 5, 1880).

⁹⁸⁴ These types of statements also exist in Persian documents produced by Kurds. A letter from 1880, again written in Persian by Kurdish religious leaders, indicates that Kurds, in communicating with foreigners, referred to themselves as a nation (*mellat* in Persian, *millet* in Ottoman/Turkish). In addition to the use of this term, the overall content of the document reveals that they saw themselves as a separate ethno-national entity, as the letter reads “last year, due to various types of lawlessness, injustices and aggressions of the Persian state against us...some of us from *mellat-e Kurdistan* (the nation of Kurdistan) rose against this state’s injustices and aggressions [but on other] side we were [also] threatened and intimidated (*takhvif*) by the Ottoman state” (*Sabab-e be anva’-e ta’addiyât-e İran o bî-qânunî ânhâ na-tavanestîm ba’ishân gozârân o momashât namayîm parsâl ... ba’zî az mellat-e Kordestân ba’ davlat-e İran be-maqâm raf’-e zolm o ta’addiyât-e İran amadand o az yek taraf davlat-e ‘Osmâniyê tahdîdât o takhvîfat-e shadîdê bar sar-e mâ kardand*). See Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak*, 56.

It should be stated that neither of the authors is able to present any evidence or claim about the Sheikh’s mistreatment of or his antagonism toward Christians during and after the War. However, they both discount or belittle the Sheikh’s own statements. As mentioned, they also dismiss the fact that even before his revolt against the Qajar state in 1880, the Sheikh had revolted against the Ottomans in 1879.

some of which have been reproduced in English, French, and Persian. Only a few of them are known well enough to be rendered in British documents. On October 5, 1880, in one of his letters to Dr. Cochran, an American missionary, the Sheikh wrote that

The Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. Their religion is different (to that of others), and their traditions and customs are distinct. It is known among nations as mischievous and corrupt. This is how Kurdistan has been depicted...Kurdistan has got a bad reputation, and has been disgraced...The chiefs and Rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian Subjects, and the inhabitants of Kurdistan, one and all are united and agreed that matters cannot be carried on in this way with the two Governments, and that necessarily something must be done, so that European Governments, having understood that matter, shall inquire into our state...⁹⁸⁵

Also, in his letter to Iqbal ad-Dowle, governor of Urmia, the Sheikh declared that

The Governor is, no doubt, aware that ... no serious inquiry having now been made into the condition and affairs of Kurdistan, its people have always been painted in the very worst colors ... The reason why complaints are made against the Kurds is that neither the Turkish nor the Persian Governments have either the power or the will to govern them properly. Through all this the Kurds get a bad reputation, and they in their turn have no respect for their Rulers. In view of this state of affairs, both the Persian and Turkish Kurds to unite and for a single nation, and keep order among themselves, and they undertake to bind themselves in writing that no disorder shall take place in their country ... It will be impossible to quell the present movement by force — if the government resorts to it, they will be the losers, and great loss will result on every side. It is therefore advisable that the governments should adopt a pacific measure, otherwise there is no answering for the consequence.⁹⁸⁶

Since Sheikh Ubeydullah was neither a historian nor a sociologist nor an ethnographer, then the question may arise as to what his goal was in separating the Kurds from other nations. What was he attempting to accomplish by these utterances? What *we* are doing here is trying to tease apart (1) what his intentions were, and (2) what picture of his politics his words illustrate. Thus to make sense of a speech act is to decode “the meaning of an action [which] seems equivalent, in the case of linguistic action, to understanding the nature of the illocutionary act

⁹⁸⁵ Sheikh Ubeydullah to Dr. Cochran. *Correspondence. Turkey*. No. 5/61.Incl. 3 (1881).

⁹⁸⁶ Sheikh Ubeydullah to Iqbal ad-Dowleh. *Correspondence. Turkey*. No. 5/61. Incl. 5 (1881).

performed by the speaker.”⁹⁸⁷ The Sheikh addressed his letters to an official audience, and the contents and the context of his letters are plainly political. Hence, the letters are political statements or arguments to achieve certain political goals. This political aspect of his letters, the nature of his argument, and the way he describes or ‘narrates’ the Kurds become a matter of utmost importance to understanding his intentions. Moreover, we want to find an answer to the questions of why he made such political statements at that particular time and why he addressed those specific political figures. These questions arise since, as mentioned earlier, some scholars have raised doubts about the authenticity of the Sheikh’s views and consider his language to be a counterexample or an anomaly in Kurdish tribalism/religiosity. Those who consider his views inauthentic believe that the Sheikh could not have held nationalistic views since he was a religious person and lived in tribal socio-cultural context that left no room for the emergence of nationalism. My contention here is that instead of dismissing the Sheikh’s letters as anomalous to a certain way of conceptualizing non-state entities, one should be open to the possibility that these documents may prove the statist approach to history to be misleading.

‘Tribalism,’ we are told,⁹⁸⁸ is a paradigmatic model to which the idea of nationalism is supposedly anomalous. The Sheikh’s statements or utterances are therefore deemed unfit to or imposed on that paradigm of tribalism. This “set of usage” is not expected to be employed by a specific “community of language-users for purposes [that are] political, interested in and extending sometimes as far as the articulation of a world-view or ideology.”⁹⁸⁹ The attempt here is to make sense of those statements themselves with the assumption that they cannot be ignored.

⁹⁸⁷ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method*, vol. 1 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 113.

⁹⁸⁸ Cf. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*. Also, Özoglu, "Does Kurdish Nationalism Have a Navel?."

⁹⁸⁹ I am employing Pocock’s definition of discourse in a different context. See: J. G. A. Pocock, "Concepts and Discourses: A Difference in Culture?," in *The Meaning of Historical Concepts; New Studies on Berschiffsgechichte*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute 2004), 48.

The utterances' illocutionary force should be enough to be treated as a piece of political literature. Instead of imposing our views on the persons who uttered them, one should let the documents to speak for their author or at least take the document seriously, given that some interpretation is likely to still be necessary.

As indicated above, these letters were written for political purpose(s). Now the key question is as follows: can we make sense of the Sheikh's 'intentional act' through a close reading of these letters? To what degree can these writings shed light on their own historical context? In his letters, the Sheikh tries to describe the Kurds. He attempts to convince his audience that the Kurds are a separate people or "a people apart." They are neither Persians nor Ottomans. He does so in exaggerated language. The Sheikh goes as far as to say the Kurds believed in a distinct religion. Why did Ubeydullah want to convince Britons and others that the Kurdish religion was different from that of their coreligionists? What was the underlying logic? Was this the only way to convince the Great Powers that the Kurds had no religious loyalty to the Ottomans?

The key issue here is that although prior to the Sheikh's uprising the Kurdish region was known for its anti-centralist uprisings, and most likely they had not emphasized their distinct identity then.⁹⁹⁰ It is Sheikh Ubeydullah who emphasizes the distinct ethnicity, religion and language of the Kurds and turns these into a basis for the legitimacy of his political claims. There had been a pattern of Kurdish uprisings even before the late 19th century. Prior to the Sheikh's revolt, however, the rebels had not cited Kurdishness as the reason for their uprisings. Ethnic differences and possible discriminatory policies must have played some role in the previous

⁹⁹⁰ It should be noted that in his book, which was published in 1870, Osman Seifi maintains that he had personally witnessed strong nationalist sentiments and desire for independence among the Kurds. See Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, 210-15.

revolts, but they had not exhibited signs of Kurdish self-reflection nor had they made any demand based on the distinct ethnicity of the participants. What distinguishes the Sheikh's revolt from the previous ones in Kurdistan lies in the Sheikh's tying the legitimacy of his political claims to his own description of the Kurdish community. This is exactly what is at the heart of modern nationalist claims in which the nation is presumed self-evident. This is best articulated by Billig when he notes that "nationalism, *as a way of depicting community*,"⁹⁹¹ is a historically specific form of consciousness. On the first page of *Nations and Nationalism*, Gellner asserts that 'nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.'"⁹⁹²

The Sheikh based his demands on the claim of distinct characters of the Kurdish nation. The Sheikh not only isolates Kurdish customs, traditions, and language from all others but also, as has been mentioned repeatedly, claims the existence of a distinct Kurdish religion. Even if in his original letter by the religion difference the Sheikh only meant the denominational differences among *Sunni* Muslims, which most likely was the case, the utterances' political significance is not diminished.

What needs to be emphasized is that the Sheikh saw a direct connection between his description of the Kurds and securing their rights. Believing that certain facts will produce certain rights, the Sheikh, as a political agent, described or presented his 'facts.' This is what Derrida, in his discussion on the American Declaration of Independence, calls "the prescription, the fact, and the right."⁹⁹³ This type of phrasing is unique to the era of nationalism. It is this era's

⁹⁹¹ Emphasis added.

⁹⁹² Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 19.

⁹⁹³ Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 51.

convention to present a certain human collectivity's characteristics as 'facts' to use these 'self-evident facts' as the bases for demanding some 'inalienable' political and cultural rights. As we have seen, in this case the Sheikh describes the Kurds and declares them to be a single political entity, separable from other Muslim communities. Such declaration of the 'facts' and the constitution of them, takes place all at once. As Derrida puts it, "[t]his obscurity, this undecidability between, let us say, a performative structure and a constative structure, is required to produce the sought-after effect."⁹⁹⁴ Unlike that of the Americans, the Sheikh's declaration did not succeed in producing a state. However, it did summon into being a novel idea of the Kurds as a singular entity.

With the benefit of Austin's insight, one could say that with the declaration of the distinctness of the Kurds, the Sheikh did create the *nation* that he wished to create, notwithstanding his lack of success in creating the state.⁹⁹⁵ Austin, as Skinner notes, "stressed that, in speaking about the force of an utterance, he was mainly pointing to what an agent may have been doing *in* the act of saying what was said."⁹⁹⁶ So it is after these utterances that Kurdishness (*Kurdayeti*), not Kurdish tribes taken separately, became an issue of central concern. No matter which side of the border this invocation of Kurdishness took place on, the very invocation of Kurdishness becomes equated with a claim to sovereignty. The Sheikh, as later Kurdish history evidenced, made it natural to talk about the rights of the Kurds on the other side of the border. He used their collective suffering as a justification for this declarative act. He attempted to erase "the signature" of other states, to borrow Derrida's line, and aimed at

⁹⁹⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁹⁵ See, J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, William James Lectures (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

⁹⁹⁶ Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 104.

“‘dissolving the links’ of their ‘paternity or maternity’.”⁹⁹⁷

Without coming to terms with the possibility of the fusion of religion and nationalism, one cannot explain how an actor whose main role and function was to lead his community in its religious affairs⁹⁹⁸ would use this language and become involved in a “politics of the performative.” The expected theological stance,⁹⁹⁹ to be drawn from a sheikh — any sheikh — is guarding the bonds of the *umma* as sacrosanct links. What is seen, however, is that these bonds are either dissolved or become secondary in the religious actor’s political thoughts as he ventures on this nationalistic enterprise. This is the case since the actor is ready to go against his coreligionists to further his ethnic nationalist cause. He rethinks these bonds with his current ethnic Other in their entirety. He is, at least, undisturbed by creating a new boundary between himself and his coreligionists on ethnic lines. These changes in the religious actor’s views take place along with the changes in his perception of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ These new political stances evidently are not the result of the actor’s conversion or complete abandonment of his religion. On the contrary, these political stances are usually justified religiously. This illustrates the penetration of what is known as national consciousness, for with it “each person mirrors (*ma’kas*) his own nation,”¹⁰⁰⁰ says Said Nursi, the renowned Kurdish religious leader. Thus, in studying the connection between religion (or Islam in particular) and nationalism, one has to look into how the nation-state becomes a kind of Weberian ideal type for governance.

⁹⁹⁷ Derrida, *Negotiations*, 50.

⁹⁹⁸ As indicated earlier, Speer states that “next to *the Sultan and the Sheriff of Mecca the Sheikh was the holiest person among the Sunni Mohammedans*. Thousands were ready to follow him as the vicar of God.”

⁹⁹⁹ The boundaries of the community of the faithful were a matter of theological disputation between the Mu’tazilah and Ash’ari schools of Islamic theology (*kalam*). See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Ottomanists would later generally hold that nationalism in Muslim societies had remained latent in this theological stance; the belief in the unity of the Islamic *umma*. For example, see Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Nursi, *İçtimai Dersler/ Social lessons*, 189.

Whether it is an ‘ideal type’ or a ‘paradigm,’ as Billig calls it, nationalism is a modern convention, i.e., the universally accepted tradition of governance. Also, it is a framework which is conventionally assumed to bring a resolution to communal conflicts, notwithstanding its bloody history.¹⁰⁰¹ As Anderson puts it, “the ‘nation’ proved an invention on which it was impossible to secure a patent.”¹⁰⁰² It became susceptible to being pirated by disparate and at times unexpected hands.”¹⁰⁰³ Thus, if Billig’s insight of nationalism as a paradigm is accepted, then when one is within it, one thinks and acts nationalistically. Nationalism then provides a conventional procedure for the nationalist speech act to occur. To Billig, nationalism is a paradigm since it provides the framework for our thought, which in itself becomes invisible to us. We could all be nationalist without even being conscious of our nationalism, which is why it is “taken for granted” or “banal.”¹⁰⁰⁴ The ‘invisible force’ of nationalism remains invisible to us. It must be this invisibility and omnipresence that makes it both local and universal.¹⁰⁰⁵ Therefore, instead of thinking of nationalism only in terms of its connection with technological progress and industrialism’s advancement, à la Gellner, it seems more useful to think of nationalism more as a paradigm.¹⁰⁰⁶

To come back to the Sheikh’s speech act, it can be only understood within the nationalist paradigm. It is within this paradigm that a distinct national group, based on self-referential

¹⁰⁰¹ Cf. Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁰² The emphasis here is on the fact that the attempts for “making the political and the national congruent” are conventionality accepted, at least theoretically. Otherwise, as indicated earlier, some aspects of this approach that sees nationalism as a universal “modular” has been critiqued by Chatterjee in his various works. See Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories. The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*.

¹⁰⁰³ Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London ; New York: Verso, 1991), 67.

¹⁰⁰⁴ See, Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid., 9–30.

¹⁰⁰⁶ In this way, Gellner could have overcome his own problematic conceptualization. While Gellner finds nationalism to be an outgrowth of high industrialism, he acknowledges that it could emerge in highly pre-industrial societies as well. He states that “it is not denied that one may on occasion have an overlay of preindustrial structures and national sentiment.” Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 138.

claims about itself, can demand certain political rights. It is within this paradigm that claims to nationhood are seen as rights and it becomes conventional to make such claims. In previous eras, such a convention did not exist.¹⁰⁰⁷ Despite the existence of nations in pre-nationalist eras, the claim to national sovereignty and self-rule based on distinct ethnic and collective characteristics was absent. Again, it is in this nationalistic paradigm that such claims have become conventional.

We can determine whether an utterance is nationalistic, if nationalism is understood as a dominant modern convention. Hence, Austin's observation pointing out that "[t]here must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances"¹⁰⁰⁸ can be expanded and applied to nationalist utterances as well. This approach can help us determine whether or not the Sheikh's speech act took place within this paradigm or whether he was invoking this convention. Again, if Austin's conditions on speech acts are applicable to nationalist claims, their conventional efficacy becomes a reality when they are uttered "by certain persons in certain circumstances."¹⁰⁰⁹ If 'persons' here is replaced with 'community,' this community must 'imagine' and claim its distinctness. This perception of in-groups' distinctness is a unique form of 'imagination,' which only within the current paradigm could produce legitimate claims. It constitutes the right circumstance that renders the pursuit of nationhood or declaration of it sensible. In all likelihood, if similar claims were even made in pre-nationalist eras, they did not have either any efficacy or any meaning. Also, if individuals or groups who do not speak on behalf of an 'imagined community' do not follow the right procedure, their

¹⁰⁰⁷ Cf. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 14.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid.

declaration of a nation would not amount to more than what Austin calls reporting “a phatic act” like stating that “the cat is on the mat.”¹⁰¹⁰ Its efficacy would not go beyond a historian’s writing on any given people’s history.

The Sheikh backed up his declaration with a revolt. He foregrounded the legitimacy of his revolt in his own description of “the nation” as a legitimizing procedure that is only known to people in the age of nationalism. He first described the nation, which was equivalent to the declaration of its existence, and then he used these “sought-after-facts” as the bases for declaring the Kurds’ right to statehood. Thus, he wrote:

We also are a nation apart. We want our affairs to be *in our own hands*, so that in the punishment of our own offenders we may be strong and independent, and have *privileges like other nations*; and respecting our offenders, we are ready to *take upon ourselves* that *no harm or damage shall occur to any nation*. This is our object, and the reasons of my son’s going to Souj Boulak, so as to obtain inquiry into the state of Kurdistan.¹⁰¹¹

The above statement not only illustrates the Sheikh’s awareness of nationalism, but also suggests that he must have assumed that his utterances had a certain legitimacy and acceptability. Therefore, with his claim, the Sheikh must have believed that he was making a certain moral and political argument that would have turned the creation of a Kurdish state into a kind of moral imperative. The “conventional procedure” was the idea of the nation-state and the assumption that any ethnic group with a certain characteristic could claim a nation of its own. The assumption is that within the accepted convention of nationalism, such claims must have force. The Sheikh mostly used this language of morality when he addressed the Westerners. For instance, in his letter to Dr. Cochran the Sheikh wrote that

neither the Ottoman nor the Persian Government has purity of intention. They have not gone into any of our right...It is because of these kinds of things that Kurdistan *is obliged to be, and is, under the necessity of being united*, and can (no longer) put up

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid., 95.

¹⁰¹¹ Sheikh Ubeydullah to Dr. Cochran. *Correspondence. Turkey. Incl. 3. No. 5/61*(1881).

with any such base and ruinous acts. We therefore earnestly beg of you that you will fully inform, and explain the matter to, the British Consul at Tabreez, so that, please God, *the case of Kurdistan being understood*, it may be inquired into.¹⁰¹²

In making the case for a Kurdish state, the Sheikh tried to convince the Great Powers, especially Britain, to support him in his undertaking. He may have genuinely believed that if “the case of Kurdistan [was] understood [by them], it may be inquired into.” That is, he thought that if the British government understood Kurdistan’s situation and if its legitimacy for nationhood were made clear, then this would be a *necessary condition* for Kurdistan to become a sovereign nation-state. Whether or not he misinterpreted the colonial powers’ intentions is secondary to the fact that he held that the time was ripe to make a case for Kurdish statehood. This signifies his consciousness of the era he lived in. The Sheikh could not have hoped for any result without assuming that his utterances could make some sense. For making such utterances “the meaning of the utterance itself, together with the context of its occurrence, are such that the speaker feels no doubt about the capacity of his or her audience to secure ‘uptake’ of the intended illocutionary act.”¹⁰¹³ The Sheikh’s utterances reveal the context of his utterance, which at the same time evidences the author’s own familiarity with the context. Therefore, the Sheikh’s arguments were modern and nationalistic.

It is instrumental to pay attention to some of his “certain references”¹⁰¹⁴ to see how these references signify the nationalist context of the Sheikh’s letters. These “certain references” could not exist before their modern conceptual framework came into existence, and they could not have been available to people before the modern era — before their entry into the nationalist paradigm. The Sheikh’s argument could only take place within this paradigm. Although in

¹⁰¹² Sheikh Ubeydullah to Dr. Cochran. *Correspondence. Turkey. Incl. 2 No. 5/61*(1881) (emphases added).

¹⁰¹³ Skinner, 113.

¹⁰¹⁴ Austin, *How to do things with words*, 94.

previous eras there may have been instances in which Kurds invoked Kurdish ethnicity, they did not or could not ask for “the national and the political” to become congruent. For instance, the 17th century Kurdish poet Ahmad Xani hoped for the replacement of non-Kurds’ domination with that by the Kurds over the others. Hence Xani wrote that “If only there were unity among us, and we would obey one another, then all the Ottomans and Arabs and *Ajam* (Persians) would become our servants. We would reach perfection in religion and politics, and we would become productive in knowledge and wisdom.”¹⁰¹⁵ Xani wished the existence of a rule by a Kurdish prince or *Mir*, without arguing for the Kurdish nation’s right for self-rule.¹⁰¹⁶ But Sheikh Ubeydullah argued the Kurds were a distinct nation and therefore they should rule themselves.

¹⁰¹⁵ Martin Van Bruinessen, “Ehmedi Xani’s Mem u Zin and its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish National Awareness,” in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Abbas Vali (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 44.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ethnic self-awareness should not be confused for or equated with nationalism. Amir Hassanpour (2003) also attends to the same subject. Hassanpour, however, is leaning toward a claim to the existence of some sort of ethnic nationalism prior to the 19th century. However, Abbas Vali criticizes Hassanpour’s take on this issue in the same collection of essays. Nevertheless, Hassanpour’s discussion on Xani, the famous 17th Kurdish poet deserves great attention. He quotes one of Xani’s poems, which reads:

Look, from the Arabs to Georgians,

The Kurds have become like towers.

The Turks and Persians are surrounded by them,

The Kurds are on all four corners.

Both sides have made the Kurdish people,

Targets of their arrows of fate.

They are said to be keys to the borders,

Each clan (tayife) forming a formidable bulwarks.

Whenever the ottoman sea [Ottomans] and the Tajik sea [Persians]

Flow out and agitate,

The Kurds get soaked in blood,

Separating them (the Ottomans and Persians] like an isthmus (cc220-25).

Hassanpour, “The Making of Kurdish Identity: Pre-20th Century Historical and Litrary Sources,” 118-19.

He did not insist on the rule of others by Kurds. However, he insisted that the Kurds, too, ought to have their own separate state. It is true that Xani complained about the lack of unity among the Kurds. However, he believed their unity would have made them become the rulers of the Kurds *and* of other groups. Unlike the Sheikh, Xani did not invoke the idea of Kurdish self-rule in its modern sense. The Sheikh criticized the Ottoman and Qajar states' civilizing discourse and practices, which depicted the Kurds as lower beings and savages. He simultaneously defended the Kurds as a nation like any other nation and asserted that they should gain a status that put them on equal footing with other nations. By contrast, Xani's argument seems to have been more ethnocentric than nationalistic and therefore he saw the Kurds as those who deserved to rule others as opposed to being ruled by a non-Kurdish king.

What is worth noting about the Sheikh's argument is the centrality of the idea of self-rule entailed in it, which distinguishes his political views from those expressed in Kurdish politics prior to him. In principle, he sets Kurds on par with all other nations and contends that "we are ready to take upon ourselves that no harm or damage shall occur to any nation."¹⁰¹⁷ He even tries to convince other parties that a Kurdish state, as a repository of law and order, would be beneficial to them as well. In one of his letters to Iqbal ad-Dowle, the Sheikh writes that "the Kurds are no longer able to or wish to remain divided between Turkey and Iran and to be subjected to all these humiliations that they have endured till this day. Henceforth, they are firmly resolved to form a single nation."¹⁰¹⁸ After declaring the necessity of creating a Kurdish state, the Sheikh ends his letter by writing that "all that I have announced to you has been inspired by my love for Persia."¹⁰¹⁹ The Sheikh implied that his attempts to create a Kurdish state

¹⁰¹⁷ Sheikh Ubeydullah to Dr. Cochran. *Correspondence. Turkey. Incl. 3. No. 5/61*(1881).

¹⁰¹⁸ Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages from Kurdish People's History*, 49-50.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ibid.

should not be translated as hostility towards Persia since he claimed that an independent Kurdish state would bring peace and tranquility to the region.¹⁰²⁰

To the Sheikh, this self-referential and self-defined nationhood of the Kurds constituted the moral ground for them to claim their own state and to reject Ottoman and Qajar rule. As stated earlier, this argument for the necessity of the Kurdish state was in essence modern. It could not have taken place outside the modern nationalist approach to statehood. The Sheikh's letters carry a certain illocutionary force and contains certain vocabulary that belongs exclusively to "a certain construction," i.e., to the nationalist paradigm.

In short, the Sheikh's use of specific language with certain references took place in a "particular occasion" or era. Emphasizing the occasion with its connection to the use of certain language is vital in reading and understanding the Sheikh's political statements and writings. Expanding on Austin's work, Skinner remarks that Austin "placed his main emphasis on the fact that we need in addition to grasp the particular *force* with which any given utterance (with a given meaning) may have been issued on a particular occasion."¹⁰²¹ The key terms here are "the particular force" of the utterance along with "the particular occasion" that provides the meaning and sheds light on the context of the utterance. In our case, instead of essentializing his religious adherence and the socio-cultural context of his operation, which would result in a dismissal of the Sheikh's utterance, we need to see how his utterances shed light on his politics.

The Sheikh's scattered writings thusly should be read on several different levels. First, The Sheikh describes or narrates a nation and with his very narration tries to justify the Kurdish claim to statehood. Second, by setting the Kurds as a nation on par with others, the Sheikh

¹⁰²⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰²¹ Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 104.

delegitimizes or attempts to delegitimize both Ottoman and Qajar rule in Kurdistan. Third, his 'claiming a nation' signifies a particular occasion of the ascendancy of nationalism that the Sheikh himself influenced and was influenced by during its rise, and therefore he deemed it natural and necessary to distinguish the Kurds as a nation to gain the right to a separate state. Finally, not only was his Islamic faith no barrier to his nationalism, it accommodated and served his nationalistic views and made it even easier to imagine the Kurds as a distinct community.

Chapter 7

Kurdish Nationalism and *Khilafa* in Nursi's Pre-exile Writing

In essence, the purpose of the religion is none other than serving the
nation.

- Abdulmelik Fırat¹⁰²²

Bediüzzaman Said Kurdi or Nursi (1878–1960) was a Kurdish mullah who produced a substantial body of writing. Nursi was trained at a Kurdish *Medrese* and had close connections with the Kurdish community.¹⁰²³ His pre-exile life is another illustration of how one's ethno-nationalism can impact one's religious interpretation. Nursi was an ardent advocate of constitutionalism, a bitter enemy of the Hamidian state, and an active figure in Kurdish politics before his exile in 1925. In many ways, his works demonstrate the fears, anxieties, and ambivalence of Kurdish religious leaders of his time. Bediüzzaman's pre-exile writings (1907-1925) exhibit three central trends that substantially contributed to his thought: a) the growth of Kurdish nationalism; b) Ottoman Constitutionalism and anti-Hamidian politics; and c) the increasing fusion of religion and nationalism in Muslim thought.

¹⁰²² Süleyman Çevik, "Şex Seîd Ew Wezîfe Ku Daye Sere Xwe Bi Ferdi U Cemaeti Aniye Cih' / Sheikh Said Did What He Was Required to Do," *Nûbihar* no. 45 (6/1996). Abdulmelik Fırat (1934 - 2009) was a Kurdish scholar, politician and the grandson of Sheikh's Said, the leader of 1925 Kurdish rebellion in Turkey.

¹⁰²³ In 1908, Nursi sent telegrams to the Ottoman Kurdish tribes to inform them about the compatibility of constitutionalism with *Shari'a* (I. D. p, 158). Also, from 1909 to 1911, Nursi spent two years in Kurdistan and encouraged the Kurds there to support a constitutionalist system. At the end of his trip, Nursi was apparently satisfied with his achievement, proudly uttering: "O! The patriots, you should know that now the Kurds also are either constitutionalists or becoming increasingly receptive to the constitutionalist ideas (*fikran*).” Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 81.

Contrary to commonly held views, Islam did not serve as a barrier to Kurdish or Turkish ethnic self-consciousness.¹⁰²⁴ The writings of iconic figures such as Said Nursi are a perfect illustration of the impact of nationalism. Yet it is generally claimed that Nursi was categorically against all forms of nationalism. For instance, Mardin states that

Said Nursi is said to have figured among the founders of this association [the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (*Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti*)]. But a number of points have to be taken into account here, which, in fact, absolve Said from *the accusation of being a separatist*. Said does not figure among the directorate elected at the first general meeting of the society. He is not mentioned as a founder by the scholar who has collected the most extensive information about the association (Tunaya, II, 1986, 186f.). He claims that *he was always opposed to nationalism*, which he considered an evil doctrine because it *had created divisions among the followers of Islam*.¹⁰²⁵ (Emphasis added)

Nursi's own writings, as will be shown below, attest that he had no qualms about dividing nationalism into two different categories: *positive* and negative. He considered nationalism to be positive as long as it did not deny others' rights or existence.¹⁰²⁶

In the Kurdish case, Islam became a marker of ethno-national identity. Nursi's pre-exile writing reveals this reality. Nursi attributes many of his own religious and ethnic qualities to his Kurdishness. This trend, in which one's religious authenticity was connected to one's ethnicity, may have started in the late 19th century. It continued and gained greater dimensions in the 20th century.¹⁰²⁷ In particular, the 1880 revolt led by the Kurdish Naqshbandi Sheikh Ubeydullah of

¹⁰²⁴ Cf. Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*; Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*.

¹⁰²⁵ Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 90.

¹⁰²⁶ It is important to note that way here Nursi conceptualize (collective) rights in and of itself is an indication of how he was influenced by modern nationalist thoughts.

¹⁰²⁷ Erik Zürcher believes that there are existed a continued connection between Turkish nationalism and Islam occurred up to the 1980s. See; Zürcher, "The Importance of Being Secular: Islam in the Service of the National and Pre-National State."

Nehri was a manifestation of this approach to Islam among the Kurds.¹⁰²⁸ Ottoman administrative documents reveal that this particular revolt—which symbolized a fusion of religion and Kurdish nationalism—had a far reaching impact on Kurdish politics in general.¹⁰²⁹ At some levels it made Kurdish politics more ambiguous, since it convinced some actors that without outside help, Kurdish independence would not be possible. Nonetheless, it also offered a new meaning to *Kurdishness* and became a source of inspiration and continuous discontent with the state.

Sheikh Ubeydullah's revolt continued to influence Kurdish religious figures. The youngest son of Ubeydullah, Sheikh Abdulqadir, who later became the speaker of the Ottoman senate, emerged as an indispensable figure in Kurdish politics after his father's defeat.¹⁰³⁰ The same Sheikh Abdulqadir¹⁰³¹ started his anti-caliphate propaganda after being exiled in 1882. He disseminated anti-Hamidian views by sending out letters to the Kurdish region from Mecca.¹⁰³² In 1894 in Medina, Abdulqadir held a meeting with a number of other well-known Kurdish dissidents, including Mela Selim Efendi, well-known for his revolt in 1914 in Bitlis.¹⁰³³ This group of Kurds renewed their pledge to struggle against the Ottoman Empire as a means of

¹⁰²⁸ Cf. Nehri, *Tuhfetul Ehabab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri*, 106-40.

¹⁰²⁹ Cf. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA): Dosya No: 5; Gömlek No: 99/2; Fon Kodu: Y.PRK.ASK. 10/21/1880).

¹⁰³⁰ Abdulqadir was well known and respected in all regions of Kurdistan. The following poem by a poet from Saujbolaq (now Mahabad) illustrates this reality as the poet describes Sheikh Abdulqadir as someone “from [Kurdish] notability and yet so concerned about the welfare of the helpless Kurds. He is the sea of ‘*irafan*’ (gnosis) and the very manifestation of altruism...” *Jin*. (No: 7; 1918).

¹⁰³¹ After WWI, Abdulqadir, Nursi and a few other like-minded figures co-founded a Kurdish political organization.

¹⁰³² Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 14; Gömlek No: 50; Fon Kodu: Y.PRK.ASK. Tarih: 17/Za/1299 (Hicrî) [30.09.1882]; BOA: Dosya No: 1946; Gömlek No: 91; Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 13/L /1309 (Hicrî) [10.05.1892]; Also, BOA: Dosya No: 1971 Gömlek No: 47 Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 18/Z /1309 (Hicrî) [13.07.1892].

¹⁰³³ İsamil Hekki Shaweys, "Nawdarani Kurd: Mela Selim Efendi," in *Rojî Nuwê* (1960/2011).

championing their desire for an independent Kurdistan.¹⁰³⁴ Notably, considering the precariousness of the Kurdish situation in a post-WWI environment, Abdulqadir formulated Kurdish political demands in the form of a request for autonomy rather than independence, usually in public. In secret, however, he and his nephew Seyyed Taha were known for their unyielding efforts to garner British support for the creation of an independent Kurdish state.¹⁰³⁵ British records reveal that “in Constantinople ‘Abdul Qadir of Shamsdinan was ready to assume...the hypothetical post of ruler of a united Kurdistan.’”¹⁰³⁶ So, in his secret meetings with Western delegates, Abdulqadir, along with Nursi and others, seems to have been more comfortable expressing the real Kurdish desire.¹⁰³⁷ Abdulqadir also seemed to have been hopeful that if the Kurds were able to make their case, the League of Nations might recognize their right to an independent state.¹⁰³⁸

State records show that the 1880 revolt had a significant effect on the mutual perceptions of the Ottoman state and the Kurds. Therefore, for almost a decade after the revolt, a major rift between the state and the Kurds continued to exist. To the extent that the Ottoman state was forced to come up with a new policy to bridge this gulf,¹⁰³⁹ the state had to make use of

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰³⁵ Rıza Zelyut, *Dersim İsyanları Ve Seit Rıza Gerçeği/ the Rebellions of Dersim and the Real Case of Seyyed Rıza* (Ankara: Kripto Kitaplar, 2010), 59.

¹⁰³⁶ House of Commons Parliamentary papers online., "Mesopotamia (Review of the Civil Administration). Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia," ([Cmd. 1061]1920), 70.

¹⁰³⁷ Kadri Cemil Paşa (Zinar Silopi), *Doza Kurdistan (Kürdistan Davası): Kürt Milletinin 60 Yıllık Esaretten Kurtuluş Savaşı Hatıraları/ the Kurdish Question* (Ankara: Özge yayınları, 1991), 57.

¹⁰³⁸ Ehmed Teqî and Celal Teqî, *Xebati Geli Kurd Le Yadaştekanî Ehmedî Teqî Da/ the Kurdish Struggle in Ahmad Taqî's Memoir* (Stockholm: Sara Bokförlag, 1988), 13-15.

¹⁰³⁹ (*Kürdistan'da halk ile hükümet arasındaki ihtilafın giderilmesi için*).

Arabic.¹⁰⁴⁰ Arabic was the most commonly taught language in Kurdish *Medreses* and the state tried to use Arabic to propagate its policies in Kurdistan. The state's creation of *Aşiret Mektebi* (tribal schools),¹⁰⁴¹ with its "civilizing" objectives, and Hamidiya Calvary¹⁰⁴² were components of new assimilatory policies in Kurdistan. It was in the same context that Abdülhamid II himself had remarked that "[w]e can now tolerate within our borders those who share our religion and [therefore] are one of us. We need to *strengthen the Turkish element in Anatolia* and give priority to making the Kurds part of us."¹⁰⁴³ It is important to note that "*strengthen[ing] the Turkish element in Anatolia,*" in the guise of religion, was to take place at the expense of assimilating the Kurd or making them "*part of us* [the Turks]." However, the state's attempt to "win over the Kurds' hearts" could not bring an end to anti-Hamidian state activities.

Anti-state *Sunni* Kurdish politics were expressed in various forms, and prominent Kurdish religious figures and families were under constant surveillance by the Hamidian regime. The activities of Sheikh Barzani¹⁰⁴⁴ and Sheikh Berzenji¹⁰⁴⁵ provide one example. In state records, those Sheikhs' activities are usually referred to as *ifsad* (dissemination of vice) and *şekavet* (brigandry).

¹⁰⁴⁰ BOA::Dosya No: 1428 Gömlek No: 43 Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 09/L /1304 (Hicrî) [01.07.1887]; BOA: Dosya No: 1432 Gömlek No: 109 Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 25/L /1304 (Hicrî) [17.07.1887]; Also, BOA: Dosya No: 1453 Gömlek No: 73 Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 20/M /1305 (Hicrî) Tarih: 20/M /1305 (Hicrî) [08.10.1887].

¹⁰⁴¹ Cf. Akpınar and Rogan, *Aşiret, Mektep, Devlet: Osmanlı Devletinde Aşiret Mektebi*

¹⁰⁴² For more on Hamidiye Calvary see: Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone*.

¹⁰⁴³ Heper, *The State and Kurds in Turkey: The Question of Assimilation*, 47. (Emphasis added)

¹⁰⁴⁴ Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 1/-2; Gömlek No: 73; Fon Kodu: DH.MUİ. Tarih: 06/N /1327 (Hicrî) [21.09.1909].;

BOA: Dosya No: 1/-6; Gömlek No: 14; Fon Kodu: DH.MUİ. Tarih: 02/Z /1327 (Hicrî) [12.12.1909].

¹⁰⁴⁵ Cf. BOA: Dosya No: 426; Gömlek No: 65; Fon Kodu: DH.MKT. Tarih: 22/Ra/1313 (Hicrî) [12.09.1895]. This document, for instance, indicates the state officials accuse Berzenji Sheikhs for anti-state activities in the last decade of the 19th century. (*Süleymaniye'de bulunan sadat-ı berzençiyenin hareket-ı şekavetkaraneleri nedeniyle emniyet-i umumiyyenin münselib olduğundan ve rüesalarının Kürdistan-ı İrani hakimine gizli nameler irsaliyle kendilerine hudud üzerinde bir mahallin tahsisi taleplerine dair, gönderilen tezkere üzerine gerekli tedbirin alınarak, tahkikat icrası gereğinin Musul Vilayeti'ne bildirildiği*).

In 1908, Sheikh Abdul Salam Barzani demanded the religio-political autonomy of Kurdistan. This autonomy would have made Kurdish an official language, required that taxes levied in Kurdistan be spent locally, and that Kurdish affairs be administered by the Kurds themselves in accordance with the *Shafi'i* school¹⁰⁴⁶ of jurisprudence.¹⁰⁴⁷ The Barzan Sheikh's discontent with Ottoman policy did not end until he was executed by the CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) government in 1914.¹⁰⁴⁸ There were various other Kurdish activities, which, despite their religious leadership, remained strictly concerned with the Kurdish political fate. The 1910-1914 uprising in Bitlis, under the leadership of the abovementioned Mela Selim, similarly exemplified the continuity of such Kurdish ethno-religious politics.¹⁰⁴⁹ Suat Parlar is right to describe *tekke* or *tekiye* (the Sufi lodge) as major "centers for the promulgation of Kurdish nationalism."¹⁰⁵⁰

With the turn of the century, the influence of nationalism on Islamic religious thought became clearer in the Muslim world in general. Even Muslim thinkers such as Sa'îd Halim Pasha, the Ottoman Grand Vizier, who held that Islamic religious beliefs were universal by their nature, had become keenly aware of the impact of national and local culture on religious

¹⁰⁴⁶ The great majority of *Sunni* Kurds are the followers of the *Shafi'i* school and the Turks follow the Hanafi School of Islamic law.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, 16-17. Also, Masud Barzani, *Al-Barzani Wa-Al-Hakah Al-Taharruriyah Al-Kurdiyah/ Barzani and the Kuridish Libaration Movement*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Bayrut: Kawa li al-thaqafa al-Kurdiyeh, 1997), 25-27.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Al-Barzani Wa-Al-Hakah Al-Taharruriyah Al-Kurdiyah/ Barzani and the Kuridish Libaration Movement*, 1, 27.

¹⁰⁴⁹ For details see: Shaweys, "Nawdarani Kurd: Mela Selim Efendi." Also, Celîl, *Kürt Halk Tarihinden 13 İlginç Yaprak/ Thirteen Interesting Pages from Kurdish People's History*, 114-40. Some high profile Kurdish activists such as Abdu al-Raziq Bedirxan from the North and Simko from the East/Iran participated in Mela Selim's revolt. Based on Turkish state documents, while on the gallows, Mela Selim shouted at the Turkish officials who had gathered for his execution and said: "You Turks go ahead and execute me. Are you not ashamed for taking over our country while you have lost so much of your own land to others? ...what would be wrong if [my hometown] Bitlis stayed in our own hands..." *Turkish Grand National Assembly's Closed Debates*, quoted in Suat Parlar, *Türkler Ve Kürtler: Ortadoğu'da İktidar Ve İsyan Gelenekleri*, Arastırma Tarih Dizisi (İstanbul: Bagdat Yayınları, 2005), 555-56.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Türkler Ve Kürtler: Ortadoğu'da İktidar Ve İsyan Gelenekleri*, 554.

interpretation. Therefore, in essence, the views of such figures also signified the influence of modern nationalist discourse on Islamic interpretations. The Grand Vizier spoke to this reality when he remarked that “just as the universal character of scientific truths engenders varieties of scientific national cultures which in their totality represent human knowledge, much in the same way the universal character of Islamic verities creates varieties of national, moral and social ideals.”¹⁰⁵¹ This assertion attests to the extent to which Muslim societies were grappling with the impact of nationalist ideas by the 20th century.

Muslim activists, scholars, and politicians from various ethnic backgrounds were shaping various interpretations of Islam into the straitjackets of their own nationalistic agendas. Their assertions usually speak to the prevalent fusion of nationalist ideas with their conceptualization of religion. As such, the assumed impurity of the other’s religious comprehension was tied to the ethnic character or history of the other. For instance, as noted in the previous chapters, ‘Abduh was not reticent to state that Islam [originally] was a religion of the Arabs.¹⁰⁵²

Rashid Rida, another prominent Islamic revivalist, “held that the Arabs had better mental faculties and possessed superior scientific minds than the Turks.”¹⁰⁵³ Rida claimed that unlike Arab conquest, which brought prosperity, the Turks brought catastrophe by conquering lands. He stressed that “the greatest glory in the Muslim conquests goes to the Arabs, and that religion grew, and became great through them; their foundation is the strongest, their light is the brightest, and they are indeed the best *umma* brought forth to the world.”¹⁰⁵⁴ However, non-Arab

¹⁰⁵¹ Quoted in: Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*.

¹⁰⁵² ‘Abduh, *Al-Islam Wa Al-Nasraniyye/ Islam and Christianity* 123.

¹⁰⁵³ Haddad, " Arab Religious Nationalism in the Colonial Era: Rereading Rashīd Riḍā's Ideas on the Caliphate " 225.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 257.

thinkers such as Gökalp believed the reverse was true. He even argued that “after their conversion to Islam, notwithstanding their strong religious faith and deep sincerity, the Turks [always] remained free from bigotry and fanaticism”¹⁰⁵⁵

What is interesting about the aforementioned Sa‘id Halim Pasha remark is the insinuation that the local character of religious interpretation, replete with elements specific to the very context of a given interpretation, simultaneously could be one form among many of Islamic universal varieties. Here, Said Pasha does not stress the universal character of the religion alone. He also acknowledges the universality of more than a single religious interpretation and by the same token the multiplicity of truths. Setting aside the paradoxical nature of his statement, Said Pasha appears to inadvertently admit that, like other forms of human knowledge, religious interpretation, or *ijtihad*, is also equally local and impure.¹⁰⁵⁶ In reality, Abdülhamid II’s reinvigoration of the caliphate should also be seen within the same context, in which the idea of a central state affects interpretation of Islam. Again, Islam becomes subservient to the interests of the state. Therefore, it increasingly comes to be seen as a phenomenon that has to be contained within the boundaries of state power and national interest. The culmination of this approach is very much visible in the Republican era.

Nursi was a product of the late-Ottoman period. Yet, he was, in a sense, an unusual and unique personality, but in combining a firm commitment to Islam¹⁰⁵⁷ with a deep concern for the

¹⁰⁵⁵ Gökalp, *Türkçülüğün Esasları/ the Principles of Turkism*.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Such views seem to have inspired well-known Muslim scholars such as Abdolkarim Soroush in Iran. See; Abdolkarim Soroush, *Qabz Va Bast-E Teoric Shari'at - Ya Nazariyeh-Ye Takāmol-E Ma'refat-E Dini/the Theory of Evolution of Religious Knowledge or- Text in Context*, 6 ed.(Tehran: Muasesay-e Farhangiy-e Sirat, 1998).

¹⁰⁵⁷ Serif Mardin sheds light on the possible impact of Afghani and ‘Abduh as well as Sufism in shaping Nursi’s religious thoughts. However, it seems,

that [the] third person, in this well-known triumvirate of Islamic reform, was Rashid Rida, in whom Muhammad 'Abdu's stress on the unicity of God took the form of a strict puritanism and an

Kurdish people, he reflected an attitude that was not uncommon among Kurdish mullahs and religious leaders.¹⁰⁵⁸ Nursi frequently boasted about Kurdish religious sincerity, and related his own personal honesty and bravery to his Kurdish upbringing. Once, frustrated at his trial at his court martial, Nursi addressed the court by saying “without being prideful, we are Kurds; we could be deceived but we do not deceive and we do not lie for an [ephemeral] life.”¹⁰⁵⁹ In another occasion, he writes: “as someone who has grown up in the mountains of Kurdistan, before visiting the capital of the *Khilafa*, Istanbul, I imagined it to be filled with beauty. Now, as I see it, Istanbul is nothing other than a savage man with a fearful and vicious heart, disguised in a civilized cloak.”¹⁰⁶⁰ Despite his occasional harsh criticism of Kurdish culture, he usually remained boastful about the Kurds. To challenge and mock widespread negative views about Kurds, he frequently referred to himself as a “primitive, *bedevi*, Kurd” and was not averse to remarking that “the pro-constitutionalist nature (*taba-i meşurtiyetperveraneleri*) of the Kurd laid the foundation of their [religious] studies in the form of debating [subject matters].”¹⁰⁶¹ When Nursi became disillusioned with the post-Hamidian Turkish state in 1909, he declared that he “[preferred] the high mountains of Kurdistan, the abode of absolute freedom”¹⁰⁶² over

attack on Sufism. To a limited extent we also find echoes of these ideas in Said Nursi, but in him the formalistic rejection of Sufism is contradicted by a revaluation of the mystical world view.

See, Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 141.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Bruinessen explains this complex and ambivalent relationship between religion and nationalism in Kurdistan when he states that “[m]any leading nationalist were irreligious or at least dissatisfied with the strong hold of mullahs and sheikhs on the people. It has on the other hand, *usually been the orthodox Muslims who formed the backbone of the Kurdish movement.*” Bruinessen, *Mulla, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society : Collected Articles*, 14.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 169.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰⁶² *Ibid.*, 177.

civilization in Istanbul.

Nursi had been involved in politics prior to his travels to Istanbul in 1907. By then he was already acquainted with the brutality of the Hamidian rule and with the ideal of constitutionalism.¹⁰⁶³ However, his first encounter with the Palace was in the context of Kurdish politics. In 1907, he criticized the state's education policy and offered a reform project that would have recognized Kurdish as one of the languages of instruction in the Kurdish Ottoman provinces. The Palace reacted to Nursi's proposal by sending him to a mental hospital. Abdülhamid's harsh reaction to Nursi's project is said to be due the Sultan's belief that it would have paved the way for the eventual dismemberment of Kurdistan.¹⁰⁶⁴

Considering the enormous significance of language and its connection with the ideas of nationalism in the Ottoman political context, the importance of Nursi's attempt must not be overlooked. This is especially the case since Nursi revered those who devoted themselves to the improvement of Kurdish language. He opined that the lack of Kurdish literacy had resulted in the exploitation of the Kurds by those who "were once inferior"¹⁰⁶⁵ to the Kurds in terms of their socio-political status.¹⁰⁶⁶ To explain the value of the Kurdish language, Nursi went as far as equating one's degree of self-worth to *one's devotion to one's mother tongue*. During his 1909-1911 trips in Kurdistan, he reproached the Kurds for their inattentiveness to the development of Kurdish, declaring that

what is called the mother tongue (*lisan-ı maderzad denilen*) is the mirror of the

¹⁰⁶³ Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey : An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*(Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 20-3. Also, Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 75-80.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 19; Ahmet Türran, "Said Nursi Ve Nurculuk," http://dergi.samsunilahiyat.com/Makaleler/1525073178_199810020211.pdf

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Ekradın madündunda bulunanlar*.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Şark ve Kürdistan Gazitesi*. (No. 1; Dec. 2, 1908). Also, Nursi, *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 507.

dissemination of national sentiment, the water for livelihood; and the tree grown out of the literary toil, the measurement of knowledge, and the criterion of [the collective level of] self-worth and perfection... I make my lamentation known to you for letting [our] language, which is a sign of civilization become dry, deficient, and dysfunctional.¹⁰⁶⁷ (Emphasis added)

It was also in this context that Nursi expressed his admiration for Halil Hayalî, the most renowned northern Kurdish poet at the time.¹⁰⁶⁸ Nursi referred to the poet as *an exemplary patriot* and remarked, “permit me to acquaint you with a model of patriotism,¹⁰⁶⁹ Motkili Halil Hayalî Efendi, who in his linguistic efforts, as in all other patriotic fields, has obtained a pioneering role.”¹⁰⁷⁰

In some Turkish nationalist historiographical works,¹⁰⁷¹ Said Nursi’s efforts for the inclusion of the Kurdish language in the educational system and the Sultan’s reaction to Nursi’s ethnically based demand have been completely obscured. For instance, M. Hakan Yavuz fabricates an entirely different story when he recounts: “In an effort to bring the natural sciences together with Islamic sciences, Nursi visited Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1907 to seek his support for a university in Van. However, the sultan *rejected his proposal to reconcile scientific reasoning with Islam*.”¹⁰⁷²

Nursi’s reading of history is one of the more important instance that shows the influence

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ibid., 191.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Before his conversion to Turkish nationalism, Ziya Gökalp was a close friend of Hayalî. Together, they wrote a Kurdish dictionary. (Zinar Silopi), *Doza Kurdistan (Kürdistan Davas): Kürt Milletinin 60 Yıllık Esaretten Kurtuluş Savaşı Hatıraları/ the Kurdish Question* 30.

¹⁰⁶⁹ *hamiyet-i millînin bir misali*.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Nursi, *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 191.

¹⁰⁷¹ It should be pointed out that some Kurdish writers have also tried to obscure the nationalist aspect of Nursi thoughts. For instance, Malmisnij’s work on Nursi exemplifies such an attempt. Malmisnij deems religion as inherently inimical to Kurdish nationalist tendencies. Cf. Malmisnij, *Said-I Nursi Ve Kürt Sorunu/ Said Nursi and the Kurdish Question*(Uppsala: Jîna Nû, 1991), 12-14.

¹⁰⁷² M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*(Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 152-53.(emphasis added)

of ethno-nationalism on his religious thought. His historiographical take reveals both his ethnic pride and what he believed to be the cause of “the decline of the Muslims.” It is clear that he viewed Ottoman caliphal history as the history of tyrannical rules (*istibdad*), while he tacitly honored past Kurdish disobedience to those rules.¹⁰⁷³ Once, addressing Kurdish porters in Istanbul, Nursi declared that the Kurds must let these six hundred years of the Turkish obedience to tyrannical rule be the history of their bygone generations.¹⁰⁷⁴ The Kurds should demonstrate their own nobility (*asaletimiz*) and only use their wisdom and knowledge.¹⁰⁷⁵

Another instance of such an impact of ethno-nationalism can be seen in Nursi’s difference with Arab revivalists over the blood lineage of the caliph and the caliphate itself. To Nursi, it is the nature of the state rather than its labels that determines its legitimacy. It is this approach to governance in Islam that constitutes one of the points of his disjunction with ethnically Arab revivalists such as ‘Abduh and Rida. Unlike ‘Abduh and his disciple, Nursi did not believe in the exclusive right of Arabs to *Khilafa*, notwithstanding that Arab revivalists influenced some important aspects¹⁰⁷⁶ of Nursi’s religious thought.¹⁰⁷⁷ As a pro-constitutionalist religious scholar, Nursi claimed that a true *shar‘i* state is a constitutionalist one and therefore it is incumbent upon all to obey such a state.¹⁰⁷⁸ *Istibdad* (tyranny), a word that was used synonymously with

¹⁰⁷³ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 26.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁶ When it comes to rereading Muslim history, Nursi seems to be echoing some views expressed in ‘*Urwah al-Wuthqá*, the joint work by al-Afghānī and ‘Abduh. For instance, Nursi states that “history shows a direct corollary between the degree of Muslim progress and their clinging to the faith. It is also evident that Muslims have always fallen behind whenever they have shown weakness in their religious devotion.” *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 258. See, Jamāl al-Dīn Al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *Al-‘urwah Al-Wuthqá, Lā InfiṣāMa Lahā* (Bayrūt: Maṭba‘at al-Tawfīq, 1328 [1910]). Also, ‘Abduh, *Al-Islam Wa Al-Nasraniyye/ Islam and Christianity* 177 onward.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 141.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*. It should be indicated that this speech was delivered in 1908 when Nursi was still very optimistic about the constitutional revolution.

Hamidian rule, was defined by Nursi as: “an arbitrary, a whimsical rule.” *Istibdad*, argued Nursi, “turns human beings into the least dignified creatures; it is this that has poisoned the Muslim world and pushed them into internal feuds and misery.”¹⁰⁷⁹

Nursi goes so far as to call the entirety of post-*Rashidun* Muslim history (661 CE onward) the history of tyrannical rules. He attributes the emergence of a number of theological philosophical schools to the existence of tyranny. Himself being an *'Asha'ari*, Nursi regarded Jabries and Mu'tazilies in the Abbasid era as false schools of religious thought that were the direct outgrowth of the tyrannical rule of their time. For him, tyranny could be either political or scholastic, but both were lethal and could do the utmost harm to “true religiosity.”¹⁰⁸⁰

As indicated above, in Nursi's thought, ethnic lineage as a qualification for the caliph was a non-issue. In Nursi's view, only one principal differentiates a caliph from a king: whether or not he follows the Prophetic path (a similar idea was defended by Ibn Taymiyyah, 1263–1328 CE). If a king follows the tradition of Muhammad he “is a caliph, a just ruler; his rule is constitutional and founded on *shar' i* precepts.”¹⁰⁸¹ Despite his conflicting loyalties, unlike Arab revivalists, Nursi never concerned himself with the ethnicity or the blood lineage of the caliph. This indicates how one's religious views could be affected by one's socio-political conditions and cultural background. Certainly, Nursi was well aware of claims that regarded Quraishi or Arab lineage as a condition for the caliphate. He almost always praised Arabs “as an illustrious

¹⁰⁷⁹ Ibid., 82-83.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ibid., 83-84. Here as Nursi seems to be echoing *The Nature of Tyranny* by al-Kawakibi. His views here particularly resemble al-Kawakibi belief in the negative impact of tyranny on religiosity and on the acquisition of knowledge. See, Abd al-Rahman Al-Kawakibi, *TabāYi' Al-Istibdād Wa MaşāRi' Al-Isti'bād/ the Nature of Tyranny and the Subjugation Struggle*, trans. Abd al-Husayn Qajar, Chap-i 1. ed., Majmuah-Yi Mutun Va Asnad-I Tarikhi (Tihiran: Nashr-i Tarikh-i Iran, 1364).

¹⁰⁸¹ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 160.

nation,”¹⁰⁸² also claiming that “the Kurds are racially related to the Arabs.”¹⁰⁸³ However, in Nursi’s thinking Arab-ness never constituted a condition for the caliphate.

In a similar vein, Nursi argued that tyranny had various manifestations. Besides the political and scholastic type, there was communal tyranny.¹⁰⁸⁴ However, he saw *meşrutiyet*, constitutionalism, as the panacea to all ills. Constitutionalism was thus not merely a political system, but a form of culture that could provide grounds for various ideas to be treated based on their inherent values and merits. If the Kurds wanted to compete with their Other, then they had to first bury the existing “communal tyranny” and adopt the culture of constitutionalism. The Kurds must “repent,” says Nursi. They needed redemption, and to collectively rush “toward doors of repentance,” which would be opened to them by adopting the culture of constitutionalism.¹⁰⁸⁵ We are told that “every nation has a spiritual pool that constitutes and protects its national audacity, honor, and power.”¹⁰⁸⁶ These components of national consciousness “work like a string for [threaded] beads.... When the idea of nationhood is shattered...the nation loses its reality.”¹⁰⁸⁷ The Kurds needed to know, Nursi opined, that some of the Kurdish religious and community leaders were tyrannical. In fact, their tyranny was the supreme impediment to Kurdish nationhood.¹⁰⁸⁸

This classification of tyranny and strong emphasis on its degenerative impact on all aspects of life illustrates the deep influence of al-Kawakibi’s celebrated work, *Tabāyi ‘al-*

¹⁰⁸² *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 53.

¹⁰⁸³ *Ibid.*, 578.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Hina meşrutiyette tevbenin kapsi açtır* *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 123-24.

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Istibdād.¹⁰⁸⁹ (Al-Kawakibi's work had widespread impact on religious scholars, as is evident in the work of prominent *Shi'i* scholar, Na'ini in Iran during the constitutional era, 1906-1909.)¹⁰⁹⁰ As shown above, Nursi saw the impact of "communal tyranny" as being extremely destructive, and the principal impediment to Kurdish nationhood. He saw "holes" in Kurdish national consciousness. In his 1911 piece, *Münazarat* (debates), Nursi tried to respond to the question of why the Kurds, despite their "extraordinary bravery, zeal, and exceptional personalities," were lagging behind their neighboring nations whose populations and power were said to be no match to that of the Kurds.¹⁰⁹¹ Once again, Nursi pointed to tyranny as the *prima causa* for the deficiencies of Kurdish politics.¹⁰⁹²

In Nursi's Kawakibi-like approach to tyranny, every human relation is based either on tyranny or justice. However, he maintains that every beauty in any just human relation originates from religion, from the teachings of Prophets—who, in Nursi's words, were masters of morality for all of humanity. Therefore, there is nothing beautiful and humane in *medeniyet*, modern civilization, that cannot be found in Islam.¹⁰⁹³ In Nursi's political thought, no tyrannical rule could qualify as the caliphate, since he considered tyranny to be in direct opposition to Muhammad's path "that was founded on justice."¹⁰⁹⁴ Thus Nursi categorically denied Abdülhamid's rule any religious legitimacy. He stated that "the connection of the horrible and

¹⁰⁸⁹ See; Al-Kawakibi, *Tabā'ī ' Al-Istibdād Wa Maşā'irī ' Al-Isti'bād/ the Nature of Tyranny and the Subjugation Struggle*.

¹⁰⁹⁰ See, Muhammad Husayn Na'ini, *Tanbih Al-Ummah Va Tanzih Al-Millah Dar Asas Va Usul-I Mashrutiyyat; Ya, Hukumat Az Nazar-I Islam/ the State and Islamic Perspective* (Tehran: Shirkat-i Chapkhanah-i Firdawsi 1955?).

¹⁰⁹¹ Nursi, *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 123.

¹⁰⁹² Ibid.

¹⁰⁹³ "Bediüzzaman Kürdinin Fihristi- Makasidi Ve Efkarinin Progmidir/ the Programme of Bediüzzam Kurdi ", *Volkan*, no. 1: 2-3.

¹⁰⁹⁴ *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 160.

unjust tyranny with *shari‘a* was no more than an illusion [created by the tyrant] to protect himself from internal and external threats.”¹⁰⁹⁵

Even after WWI, Nursi referred to the demise of the Hamidian regime as the beginning of freedom (*bidayet-i hurriyet*). However, by this time, as someone who had witnessed the horrors of the modernist CUP’s rule and the devastation of WWI,¹⁰⁹⁶ Nursi was no longer as optimistic about *medeniyet*. He thought its destructive aspect to be almost equivalent to its benefits.¹⁰⁹⁷ Nowadays, one can only think of the miseries and dilemmas of modern citizens as illustrated in Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*,¹⁰⁹⁸ when one senses Nursi’s fears and concerns about how the modern state functions. Nursi asserted that the modern state could easily “destroy Islam or Islamic brotherhood in its entirety” in the name of “protecting Islam or the caliphate.” Indeed, if a person, in an attempt to protest the state, takes refuge inside “a building as sacred and of as incalculable worth as the Ayah Sophia, this *medeniyet* can issue a *fatwa* for its destruction.”¹⁰⁹⁹

Nursi’s views of modern civilization could shed light on the complex relationship between people like him and the rising nation-state. On the one hand he saw the modern state as the carrier of modern civilization that offered an extraordinary advancement in science, medicine and technology. On the other hand, the modern state symbolized an unprecedented capacity for

¹⁰⁹⁵ "Bediüzzaman Kürdinin Fihristi- Makasidi Ve Efkarinin Progmidir/ the Programme of Bediüzzam Kurdi ", 2-3.

¹⁰⁹⁶ After his 1909 unfair trial in Istanbul, Nursi was very much disappointed with the CUP government. Nevertheless, he still joined the war alongside the state’s army. During the war he was captured by Russian forces, and was a POW in Russia until the summer of 1918. In 1918, Nursi escaped from Russian prison to Bulgaria and from there he returned to Turkey. See; Yusuf Kenan Beysülen and Cemalettin Canlı, *Zaman İçinde Bediüzzaman/ Bediüzzaman through the Time*(Istanbul: İletişim 2010), 255-57.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Nursi, *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 254.

¹⁰⁹⁸ See, Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Nursi, *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 254.

destruction and violence. At the same, for non-Turkish Muslims like Nursi, the Ottoman state represented the last remaining fortress against the full colonial takeover of the Muslim world. Like many Arabs, Kurds and other Muslims, Nursi experienced a great dilemma. He had no problem with what he termed as *musbet miliyetçilik* (positive nationalism)¹¹⁰⁰ – a type of nationalism that refrained from *tenakür* (denying other nations’ existence and rights).¹¹⁰¹ This meant recognizing the legitimacy of the disintegration of the Ottoman state. Nevertheless, Nursi was terrified by the prospect of the disappearance of the Ottoman state, the last Muslim sanctuary against Europe. Such ambivalences and “double loyalties” reflected his concerns about the fate of his own ethnic group in the face of growing Turkish nationalism. Nursi experienced socio-political pressures thusly, bearing witness to ever-increasing colonial pressure upon the Muslim world, as well as the Kurdish fear of a possible Armenian return in the wake of the Turkish-Kurdish genocidal campaign against them.

Nursi’s works thus reveal a complex stance on the Ottoman caliphate that is generally overlooked by scholarship on the subject. In the post-WWI era, there was increasing pressure on Ottoman/Turkish officials to do away with any institution with an international influence. Chief among such institutions were the caliphate and *Sheikh-al-Islam*. As early as 1920, Nursi appears to have been concerned about the weakening or possible abolishment of those institutions. He believed that in their current form, those institutions had caved in to both domestic and foreign pressures and had abandoned many Islamic precepts and requirements. Nursi proposes reforming the office of *Sheikh-al-Islam*.¹¹⁰² His attempts to reform such institutions indicate that, like many

¹¹⁰⁰ As noted earlier, Nursi’s own writings attest that he endorsed what he considered to be positive nationalism; namely, the type of nationalism that does not deny others’ rights or existence.

¹¹⁰¹ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 243.

¹¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 259.

of his fellow Kurds, Nursi was terrified by the likelihood of the emergence of an ardent Turkish nationalist state. As a last resort, some influential Kurdish figures strove for a revival of a type of Ottomanist narrative. According to Mesut Yeğen, at the time, the survival of the caliphate as a major symbol of Ottomanism could mean “maintaining the ‘status quo’ which ensured that Kurds enjoy an autonomous existence.”¹¹⁰³

Nursi’s proposal aimed at transforming the institution of *Sheikh-al-Islam* from one run by a person, the *Sheikh al-Islam*, into a type of religious legislative body with the potential for international respect and a larger following in the Muslim world. As such, this new institution would not succumb to foreign or domestic pressure when making critical decisions or issuing *fatwas*.¹¹⁰⁴ In 1921, Nursi defended the vitality of the caliphate, which he declared to be inseparable from the Sultanate. Therefore, he argued that “our *Padişah*, as a King, oversees (*nazaret*) thirty million people [within Turkey] and, as a caliph symbolizes the sacred bond among three hundred million [Muslims].”¹¹⁰⁵ Once again, this reveals that Nursi had no problem with the ever-expanding independent Muslim state—what he characterized as the “attainment of their own rightful sovereignty.”¹¹⁰⁶ Of course, Muslims’ attainment of national sovereignty was a just pursuit as long as there was some level of unity among them against European colonialism; this unity was symbolized by their reverence for the institution of caliphate.¹¹⁰⁷

It must be noted that there was another significant aspect to Nursi’s proposal, which was

¹¹⁰³ Yeğen, “The Turkish State Discourse and the Exclusion of Kurdish Identity,” 221.

¹¹⁰⁴ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 258-59.

¹¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹¹⁰⁶ Nursi seems to have thought of the emergence of the nation-state as fertile ground for the realization of individual rights. Therefore, he maintains that “every individual Muslim will obtain his/her rightful share in the governance, since the idea of the national sovereignty (*hakimiyet-i millet*) is gaining currency in Asia (*her bir ferd-i müslman, hakimiyetin bir cüz’-ü hakikisine malik olur*). *Ibid.*, 179.

¹¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 258.

rooted in his firm belief in constitutionalism. Nursi considered the caliphal role to be mostly ceremonial in a constitutional state. This aspect of his thought becomes particularly evident in his piece, *Munzarat*, published in 1911. It was a constitutional caliphate, after all, which resembled a constitutional monarchy. Nursi declared that “from now on, *Khilafa* will necessarily be represented by the ‘ulema (*meşhete İslamiye*).... Since the ruler [in a constitutionalist system] is *the public opinion*, not one person.”¹¹⁰⁸ Certainly, this was one of the issues that marked Nursi as an original thinker. This put him on a fussy and complicated borderline between “modernity” and “tradition” that afforded him the ability to fundamentally rethink Islamic governance. The credit of such rethinking, however, should in part be given to Hamidian tyranny as it strengthened and produced, at the very least, three antithetical models to its own version of caliphate: a) an opposing nationalist model such as the one advocated by the exclusive right of Arabs to the caliphate; b) a ‘secular’ model à la CUP and later Republicans in which the parliament was seen as the real political authority; c) Nursi’s model in which the office of *Sheikh al-Islam* was perceived to function as a clerical assembly, most likely paralleled by a more conventional form of *meclis*, parliament. That clerical assembly was supposed to consist of forty to fifty clerics from all the *Sunni* schools of jurisprudence and was to function as a national assembly for the entire Muslim world.¹¹⁰⁹

One point of contention with regards to the pre-exile life of Nursi is whether or not he supported the 1925 Kurdish Revolt led by Sheikh Said of Piran. Turkish nationalists, be they secular or Islamist, hold that Nursi would have not supported a nationalist/separatist revolt such as that of Sheikh Said. They adamantly reject such a possibility because, we are told, Nursi

¹¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 115.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

“always condemned nationalism in his publications and speeches.”¹¹¹⁰ Turkish Nurcu, mainly the follower of the renowned Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, go even farther and claim that “throughout his life, [Nursi] stood against any kind of Kurdist (*Kürtçülük*) activities.”¹¹¹¹ They note that Nursi not only opposed Sheikh Said’s Revolt and rejected his invitation to join that revolt, but also convinced many Kurds not to fight against the Turkish army.¹¹¹² This account, along with the people and the places that are cited in it, has already been debunked, rendering it incoherent and sloppy.¹¹¹³ Rigorously scrutinized by Turkish academics Cemalettin Canlı and Yusuf Kenan Beysülen, the story was found to have significant inconsistencies. The source of the account is himself Nurcu, who simultaneously offered two different versions of the same story.¹¹¹⁴

Nursi was certainly a moderate nationalist and, as indicated above, concentrated heavily on Kurdishness, Kurdish national consciousness, and Kurdish cultural activities in his pre-exile works. Even Özoğlu who characterizes the 1925 Kurdish Revolt as a Kemalist State-manufactured event¹¹¹⁵ admits that Nursi’s

Turkish followers try to downplay his Kurdish identity, [but] Said Nursi, particularly in his early career, paid careful attention to his Kurdishness.... Prior to his membership in the SAK [Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan], Said Nursi’s articles were printed

¹¹¹⁰ Umut Uzer, "The Genealogy of Turkish Nationalism," in *Symbiotic Antagonisms: Competing Nationalisms in Turkey*, ed. Ayşe Kadioğlu and Fuat Keyman (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2011), 112.

¹¹¹¹ İsmail Çolak, *Kürt Meselesi'nin Acılımı: Said Nursi'den Teşhis Ve Çözümler/ a Solution to the Kurdish Question; Diagnosis and Solution from Said Nursi* (İstanbul: Nesil, 2009), 134.

¹¹¹² This is the case, we are told, because in 1925 Nursi believed that there were “perhaps a hundred thousand saints in the Ottoman army.” Vahide Şükran and İbrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 109.

¹¹¹³ For a thorough study on this subject see, Cemalettin Canlı and Yusuf Kenan Beysülen, *Zaman İçinde Bediüzzaman/ over the Years Bediüzzaman*, 1. baskı. ed., Biyografi Dizisi (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: İletişim, 2010), 298-310.

¹¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁵ See, Hakan Özoğlu, *From Caliphate to Secular State: Power Struggle in the Early Turkish Republic* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 2011).

in *Kürt Teaviün ve Terakki Gazetesi*, published by the *Kürt Teaviün ve Teraki Cemiyeti* (Society for Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress), founded in 1908. According to Tarik Zafer Tunaya, a Turkish historian, Said Nursi was a member of the *Kürt Neşri Maarif Cemiyeti* (Society for the Spread of Kurdish Education) founded in 1919 by the members of the SAK.¹¹¹⁶

Furthermore, as noted earlier, Nursi was a member of the Kurdish delegate that met with American and French representatives in Istanbul in 1919. The delegate's mission was to discuss Kurdish aspirations for an independent Kurdistan with those foreign officials, notwithstanding the Ottoman state's warnings against such activities.¹¹¹⁷ Interestingly enough, it was Nursi who told the American representative that in order for Kurdistan to become a viable state, it would have to be connected to a seacoast. The American representative's response was that Nursi's suggestions would violate Wilson's points according to which an independent Armenistan should have been created.¹¹¹⁸ The point is that Nursi was not only for an independent Kurdistan but also believed in its geographical expansion such that it could have access to international waters.¹¹¹⁹

Nursi's support for an independent Kurdish state did not mean that he was ready to pursue such a goal at any cost. Most likely, Nursi would have shied away from violence and an internal Muslim fight to achieve the creation of an independent state. For Nursi, fighting other Muslims for one's nationhood could be equivalent to *menfi milliyetçilik* (negative nationalism) and constituted denial of the other (*tenâkür*).¹¹²⁰ This pacifist stance seems to coincide with the

¹¹¹⁶ Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*, 115.

¹¹¹⁷ Zelyut, *Dersim İsyanları Ve Seit Rıza Gerçeği/ the Rebellions of Dersim and the Real Case of Seyyed Rıza*, 59.

¹¹¹⁸ Ibid. Also, (Zinar Silopi), *Doza Kurdistan (Kürdistan Davası): Kürt Milletinin 60 Yıllık Esaretten Kurtuluş Savaşı Hatıraları/ the Kurdish Question* 57.

¹¹¹⁹ Zelyut, *Dersim İsyanları Ve Seit Rıza Gerçeği/ the Rebellions of Dersim and the Real Case of Seyyed Rıza*, 59. Also, (Zinar Silopi), *Doza Kurdistan (Kürdistan Davası): Kürt Milletinin 60 Yıllık Esaretten Kurtuluş Savaşı Hatıraları/ the Kurdish Question* 57.

¹¹²⁰ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 243.

general spiritual conditions in his inward journey.¹¹²¹ According to Sheikh Said's grandson, A. M. Firat, by 1925, Nursi "had already given up [the fight] and accepted his defeat."¹¹²² Firat's assessment seems to reflect the disappointment of the Revolt's leaders, including Mela Abdulmacid, Nursi's own brother.¹¹²³ Unlike Nursi, they believed in an armed struggle against the Kemalist state.¹¹²⁴ However, there is evidence revealing that Nursi remained sympathetic and emotionally attached to the participants in the Revolts and their relatives many years later. Over ten years after his exile, when he encountered the sons of Cebranli Halit Bey, the organizational leader of the Revolt, for the first time, Nursi hugged them and lost control of his emotions, "[bursting] into tears and [appearing] extremely saddened."¹¹²⁵ In a 1954 conversation with A. M. Firat, Nursi states that "I will take – I have taken the revenge of my esteemed – my most respected brother, Sheikh Said Efendi."¹¹²⁶ The same Sheikh Said had claimed that Turkish Islam

¹¹²¹ Elizabeth Özdalga makes an interesting observation about Nursi's life and how it was impacted by his imprisonment as POW and the 1925 event when she writes:

This event [in 1925] became a turning point in Nursi's life. Afterwards he abandoned political activism and the arenas of conflict and controversy. This change in his attitude had, however, occurred a couple of years before in Istanbul, during a visit to the cemetery in Eyüb by the Golden Horn. There, overlooking the city and seeing such misery after more than ten years of continuous warfare, he experienced a rare, but tangible, vision of death, as something that can befall human beings also when corporally alive. From that moment on he decided to live a different life.

Elizabeth Özdalga, "Transformation of Sufi-Based Communities in Modern Turkey," in *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Kerem Öktem, Celia Kerslake, and Philip Robins (Basingstoke England ; New York Oxford Palgrave Macmillan 2010), 81.

¹¹²² Beysülen and Canlı, *Zaman İçinde Bediüzzaman/ Bediüzzaman through the Time*, 301.

¹¹²³ Ibid., 296.

¹¹²⁴ For more on Nursi negative view about this use of violence up and his difference with the other group see: Tahsin Sever, *1925 Hareketi Ve Azadî Örgütü/ Azadi and the 1925 Movement* (Istanbul: Doz Yayınları, 2010), 169-80.

¹¹²⁵ Ibid., 172.

¹¹²⁶ *Biraderi e 'zamim, biraderi ekremim, Şeh Said Efendinin heyfini aldim, heyfini aleceğim*. See, Çevik, "Şeh Seid Ew Wezîfe Ku Daye Sere Xwe Bi Ferdi U Cemaeti Aniye Cih' / Sheikh Said Did What He Was Required to Do."

and caliphate represented “400 years of misusing Islam to enslave the Kurd.”¹¹²⁷ Furthermore, Nursi had emotional ties with the Azadi (Society for Kurdish Independence) as well as the Revolt’s leaders. Not only did Nursi’s own brother have a leading role in Azadi, he was also in close contact with other leaders, most notably Colonel Cebranli Halit Bey, until September 1924.¹¹²⁸ All this indicates that Nursi did not question the legitimacy of the revolt’s goal, but the method used in pursuing it.

A close reading of Nursi’s pre-exile writings reveals that Nursi not only had doubts about Kurdish unity but was also unsure of a widespread Kurdish national consciousness. Notwithstanding his deep concern for the fate of the Kurds, Nursi seemed to believe that, unlike the Armenians, the Kurds’ national consciousness had yet to reach the level required for forming a nation. As indicated earlier, he claimed that “Kurdish national consciousness looks like [a bunch of] beads [threaded] with a shredded string.”¹¹²⁹ He saw widespread Kurdish illiteracy and internal discord as major impediments to the growth of national consciousness. He believed the real formation of national consciousness came about when an individual member of a nation became the embodiment of its collectivity.¹¹³⁰

In 1908, Nursi made his views clear in a Kurdish address to his people: “O! Kurdish people (*ey! geli kurdan*), there is power in solidarity, life in unity, blissfulness in brotherhood, and a healthy collective life in statehood.”¹¹³¹ Three jewels needed their protection: Islam,

¹¹²⁷ To read Shaikh’s letter see: Strohmeier, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity: Heroes and Patriots, Traitors and Foes*, 89-90.

¹¹²⁸ Sever, *1925 Hareketi Ve Azadî Örgütü/ Azadi and the 1925 Movement*, : 171-72.

¹¹²⁹ “*Istibdat...[kürtlerin] fikri milliyet[sinin] ipini kesip, parça parça [etmiş.]*”Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 123-24.

¹¹³⁰ Nursi, *İçtimaî Dersler/ Social lessons*: 189.

¹¹³¹ Nursi, *İçtima-i Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 160.

humanity, and nationality.¹¹³² The Kurds still suffered at the hands of their greatest “*enemies: ignorance, poverty and discord.*”¹¹³³ Kurds could learn from Armenian nationalism; Armenians could “lead us toward awakening and progress; [so] we extend our hands of friendship toward them with the utmost pleasure.”¹¹³⁴ It should be noted, however, Nursi was simultaneously very much ambivalent about the modern state in any of its forms.

Nursi became increasingly horrified by the reckless nature of the modern state and its capability to unleash overwhelming degrees of violence.¹¹³⁵ It is possible to say that he thought that in the event of a war with the state, the Kurds might not fare any better than their Armenian neighbors. To add to this frightening picture, the Kurds still lived in complete despair and anxiety at the prospect of an Armenian return with European help, and a possible British retribution for their involvement in the 1915 Armenian genocide alongside the Turkish state. British documents shed light on this enormous fear; according to British records the “Kurds who [were] in an overwhelming majority in these districts, took alarm. And the strong nationalist sentiment, which already existed among them enhanced by the fear of Western powers, contemplated putting them under the despised Armenians.”¹¹³⁶

Considering this complex political situation, it is most likely that Nursi preferred to wait and see instead of taking an active role in Sheikh Said’s revolt.¹¹³⁷ Most of what is known about

¹¹³² Ibid.

¹¹³³ Ibid.

¹¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹¹³⁵ Ibid., 254.

¹¹³⁶ online., “Mesopotamia (Review of the Civil Administration). Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia.”

¹¹³⁷ For a detailed account on Cebranli Halit Bey’s attempts to convince Nursi to join his anti-Kemalist struggle see, Sever, *1925 Hareketi Ve Azadi Örgütü/Azadi and the 1925 Movement*, 171-79.

Nursi's connection with and remarks about the 1925 Revolt is unreliable.¹¹³⁸ It is an undeniable fact that Nursi was closely associated with many of the Revolt's leaders and had an organic bond with them. Indeed, he was a founding member of the Society for Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress.¹¹³⁹ He founded this organization with Sheikh Abdulqadir and the members of the Bedirxan family and others who later, unlike the secular and religious Turkish groups, all supported Sheikh Said.¹¹⁴⁰ Also, Nursi was well respected among both the Kurdish 'ulama and common people. Nursi's respect and fame among the Kurds was so great that, as early as 1909, he believed a telegram from him to Kurdish tribes would have sufficed to change their attitudes toward Constitutionalism.¹¹⁴¹ His influence on Kurds, particularly in the Van region, was indispensable. Moreover, as shown above, in his universalistic religio-political views on issues such as the caliphate and *Sheikh al-Islamate*, Nursi did not ignore the seriousness and the reality of the nation-state.¹¹⁴² Also, there is no evidence that the Kurdish 'ulama challenged Nursi, except on his optimism about Constitutionalism and his endorsement of greater individual liberties. Apparently, Mela Selim had criticized him for holding such views, and Nursi appears to have acknowledged the validity of Mela Selim's criticism in later life.¹¹⁴³

In summation, Nursi's pre-exile works represent a turbulent period for both Kurdish and Muslim history in general. Nursi hoped to change the attitudes of the overlords toward the Kurds

¹¹³⁸ Cf. Beysülen and Canlı, *Zaman İçinde Bediüzzaman/ Bediüzzaman through the Time*, 298-310.

¹¹³⁹ Tarik Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasi Partiler/ Political Parties in Turkey*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayinlari, 1984), 215.

¹¹⁴⁰ According to the Russian archival documents, rendered in Hewrami, no Muslim Turk, be they pro-Caliphate or anti-Caliphate, supported the Sheikh's Revolt. See; Afrasiyab Hewrami, *Şorşi Şex Sa'idi Piranu Sovyet: Le Belgename U Çapemeniyekani Sovyet Da/ the Revolt of Sheikh Said and the Soviet Union* (Suleimani: Serdem, 2002), 50.

¹¹⁴¹ Nursi, *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 158-59.

¹¹⁴² Cf. Ibid., 179.

¹¹⁴³ Beysülen and Canlı, *Zaman İçinde Bediüzzaman/ Bediüzzaman through the Time*, 173-74.

through the reforms he proposed. He also strove to change the Kurds through the introduction of a new educational system. His tragic life-story started with the hope of opening a university in Kurdistan and ended with the same hope. He hoped that new schools would change the fate of the Kurds, whom he called *benim cinsimdan*, of my own kind.¹¹⁴⁴ He ended up in a mental hospital for pursuing such a goal. He had high hopes that the 1908 Constitutional Revolution would result in many good things, highest among which was Kurdish education. Thus, he declared that “in a short time schools will be built in places where there ha[d] never been any, and the old schools will be replaced by modern ones in [every region of Kurdistan].”¹¹⁴⁵ After his disillusionment with politics, Nursi went back to Van and resumed teaching his people until he was exiled in 1925. In the 1950s, after decades of life in exile, Nursi hoped that his calls for changes to Turkish politics could mean something. Thus, he once again repeated his request for opening a university in Kurdistan. Nonetheless, in the autumn of his life, and now for the last time, Nursi was disappointed with the enduring hostility to his request to educate his own people. He saw this as his personal mission, since the Tyrant, i.e., Abdülhamid II, had kept them under *tabakat-i gaflet* (multiple layers of ignorance).¹¹⁴⁶ Özdalga summarizes Nursi’s lifelong effort for establishing a Kurdish university as follows:

In 1907 he went to Istanbul in order to convince Sultan Abdülhamid to support his project, but the Young Turks’ revolution of 1908 interrupted his efforts. He persisted in his campaign even after Mustafa Kemal had come to power, but his goal was impossible under the new secularist and nationalist regime. As late as 1951, after the Democratic Party had come to power, Nursi once more brought up the idea of establishing a university in eastern Turkey, but was again blankly refused.¹¹⁴⁷

It was also in this turbulent time that the entire Muslim world dealt with the reality of the

¹¹⁴⁴ Nursi, *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*.

¹¹⁴⁵ *İçtima-I Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 30.

¹¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹¹⁴⁷ Özdalga, "Transformation of Sufi-Based Communities in Modern Turkey," 80.

emerging nation-state and the introduction of constitutionalism in the face of colonialism. Particularly for a Kurdish leader such as Nursi, these ideas caused enormously contradictory political stances, ambivalence and dilemmas. Despite his anti-colonial and pro-Muslim unity politics, Nursi remained a believer in what he called *positive nationalism*. It must also be noted that despite his ambivalence in pre-exile writings, Nursi always remained very much attentive to the fate of Kurds as a distinct ethnicity.¹¹⁴⁸ It is true that Nursi's concerns and anxieties were not limited to the fate of the Kurds. Nursi's early writings, however, shed light on the overall context of Kurdish religious politics, and, by the same token, on the background of the Kurdish Revolt in 1925.

¹¹⁴⁸ There are examples through which Nursi invokes the name of Kurdish national heroes such as Salah ad-Din Ayyubi who is calling every Kurds to become the embodiment of the unity of the Kurdish nation. See, Nursi, *İçtimai Dersler/ Social Lessons*, 189.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to problematize a number of notions, chiefly the assumed unbridgeable gulf between religion and nationalism and the absence of nationalism in Muslim (and specifically in Kurdish and Turkish) communities before 1912. Based on such assumptions, religious interpretations are stable, and nationalism is inherently secular. However, my attempt was to show that even the most celebrated religio-political concepts such as the caliphate could function as empty signifiers. A closer look at the caliphate concept alone is sufficient to demonstrate that Islam or (more precisely) Islamic interpretations cannot easily be explained in isolation from other human affairs and concerns. The caliphate, both as a concept and as an institution emerged and took shape in a contested political environment. Its form and shape thus reflected the nature of contemporary internal Muslim rivalries as much as their religious concerns. From the start, the caliphate carried both regional and communal labels. The value attached to blood lineage for occupying that office is notable. Blood lineage became a legitimizing tool that eased the accession of certain groups to power and barred others. It seems that blood lineages, ethnic or religious ties have always served as legitimizing tools for individuals and groups to claim power or the right to govern. This is the case even in today's modern democracies.

In the aftermath of the Prophet Mohammad's death, Abu Bakr's tribal lineage (Quraishiness) was regarded as a qualification that other claimants to succession lacked. His very lineage was presented as a means to induce certain political rights, which automatically deprived non-Quraishis for their lack of such a lineage. Later, for *Shi'is*, it was charisma that could induce the

right to govern.¹¹⁴⁹ Those groups that had another type of lineage, i.e.; direct blood ties with Prophet Muhammad were deemed charismatic—in the Weberian sense of the term.¹¹⁵⁰ The most fundamental issue to be noted is the fact of how, through accommodating blood lineage, contemporaneous social relations were reproduced in the interpretations of religion and affected both juridical and institutional forms of power. This is despite the fact that the Qur'an (as the primary source of the law) regarded piety (*taqwa*) as the single criterion for nobility (*karamah*).¹¹⁵¹ Yet the supremacy of the privileged group and its exclusive right to govern was to be reinforced and constituted a juridical precedent even for the Arab claimants of *khilafa* in the age of nationalism. *Shi'i*, *Sunni*, and *Khariji* versions of Islam were molded by the debate over political legitimacy and related power relations. The debate over the caliphate and the institution itself was the product of these political and communal disputes and continued to carry marks of the power struggle until the end of the Ottoman caliphate. This points to the conspicuous impact of local cultures on a given religious interpretation. The issue of the ethnicity of the caliph becomes particularly significant as religious interpretations in the late 19th and early 20th century visibly reflect the prevalence of the impact of the ideal of nationalism.

Until the 16th century no non-Arab caliphate had a chance to emerge. There was at least one case of a non-Quraishi caliphate, the Fatimids in Egypt, but they were ethnically Arabs. The 16th-century Ottoman conquest of Arab lands coincided with the transfer of power from one ethnic group to the other: Arabs to Ottoman Turks. This led some Muslims to question Ottoman

¹¹⁴⁹ See Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads* (New Brunswick, N.J. (U.S.A.): Transaction Publishers, 1989).

¹¹⁵⁰ See *ibid.*

¹¹⁵¹ The Qur'an 49/13 (Trans. Pickthal) : "...Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct..."

caliphal claims. Until then many Muslim groups had opposed Quraishi-ness as a condition for the caliphate. With the demise of the Arab caliphate the dominant group, i.e., the Ottomans or the state itself, began to question the exclusive right of the Quraishis to the caliphate. Thus, the transformation of power changed some aspects of the debate over caliphate. Now it was up to an Ottoman grand vizier to defend the legitimacy of non-Quraish or non-Arab rule. In the new era, Arab-ness, or more precisely, the restriction of caliphal rule to the Quraishis' was going to be revitalized by the governed.

Lütfi Pasha, an Ottoman grand vizier, maintained that the caliphal quality and legitimacy of his rule should not be tied to his blood lineage. Instead, he claimed, the legitimacy of a ruler had to be based on the ability to establish order wherein the community of the faithful would be able to carry on with their religious duties in peace. In other words, the very establishment of order in and of itself would engender the legitimacy of any rule. Lütü Pasha insisted that such an act alone amounted to serving Islam. According to him, it was only through creating such an order that the community could meet the requirements of the religion and this constituted sufficient cause for the ruler to be recognized as the sultan, the caliph, the *imam*, or the *imam* of all *imams*. This line of argument in defense of Ottoman caliphal legitimacy was revitalized by Hamidian rule as it faced both foreign pressure and internal ethnic and nationalist challenges.

In the history of Muslim political thought, there is a conspicuous and continuous change in the interpretation of concepts such as the caliphate, which testifies to the socio-political influence of the context. Similarly, religious interpretations also continue to bear the impact of their context in the age of nationalism. Regional calims to the caliphate in the era of nationalism testify to the influence of Islamic reinterpretations as religious actors adopted the nation state as the ideal type of governance. The fact that religious interpretation took place within the

nationalist paradigm should also problematize the general attitude in excluding the presence of religious factors in modern nationalist thought. Hence, approaching religion and nationalism as perpetually opposed binaries appears simplistic.

Conversely, the outright denial of nationalism in religious discourses is also an equally simplistic approach to both Islam and nationalism. Thus, the thesis of the latency of nationalism in Ottoman domains is unpersuasive. It holds that unlike other imperial subjects, the 19th-century Ottoman Muslim polity remained unaffected by the growing nationalist discourse, mainly due to its Islamic identity. Like its neighboring empires, the Ottoman state, as many Ottoman scholars have argued, adopted the ongoing centralization policies in Europe. It also strove to modernize its army and bureaucratic system, and aimed at the destruction of all grounds for ethnic and religious challenges, which could not take place in a vacuum.

In addition to the measures listed above, in the early 19th century, in the hopes of offering a unified official interpretation of Islam, the Ottoman state moved to further incorporate the religious establishment into the state. Furthermore, in the last quarter of the century, the Ottoman state declared Turkish the official language and increasingly attempted to Turkify the language of its educational and bureaucratic system. Concurrently, it criminalized the cultural and linguistic activities of Albanian, Kurdish and other communities. Interestingly enough the Turkification efforts by the Hamidian state coincided with its increased focus on the religious outlook of the state. In its attempt to universalize (*ta'mim*) the Turkish language, the Hamidian regime adopted even stricter policies than the Hapsburg Empire, for instance, in its attempt to universalize German.

Immediately after the 1878 Ottoman defeat and the resultant reduction in its non-Muslim population, the Hamidian regime chose the slogan of serving Islam as the sole legitimizing

means for the state's practice. What is known as Hamidian Pan-Islamism signified changes in the modality of adaptation of modernist reforms along with a stronger emphasis on the Islamic-ness of state-sanctioned identity. These changes should not be viewed as the state's indifference toward Ottoman official nationalism; rather, they coincided with the intensification of official nationalism. The Muslim world was facing two phenomena: colonialism and the emergence of nationalism. Emphasizing the Islamic identity of the Ottoman state was partly a strategy to deal with both of these threats to the Ottoman/Turkish establishment. The reassertion of Islamic identity was to bring about obedience at home and some sort of universal Muslim unity against the colonial powers. Thus, both in its Ottoman context and beyond, as Khalid rightly argues, "pan-Islamism was a complex phenomenon whose various dimensions need to be understood separately. Once we do that, we find a variegated phenomenon more akin to nationalism..."¹¹⁵²

Foreign threats and local nationalism created a dilemma that induced a sense of double loyalty for many Muslims. In many instances, Muslims showed some sort of sympathy toward the Ottomans against the colonial powers. This, however, could not eclipse diverse Muslim communities' sense of ethnic and national belonging. Of course, even the term 'double loyalty' should be taken with a grain of salt. Different Muslim groups' perception of the Ottoman state, as in the Kurdish case, did not stay the same over the course of half a century—from Abdülhamid's accession to power to the abolishment of the caliphate. Moreover, there were moments of difference in the "public and hidden transcripts"¹¹⁵³ of leading Muslim figures and groups.

Without trying to write an extensive history of the caliphate, my aim is to demonstrate that Islamic concepts neither carried immutable meaning throughout history nor remained

¹¹⁵² Khalid, "Pan-Islamism in Practice: The Rhetoric of Muslim Unity and Its Uses," 203.

¹¹⁵³ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance : Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

unaffected by their socio-political contexts. Nor did attempts to render them stable—especially in the scholarship on Kurdish religio-political movements—have much of a base in reality. What needs to be pointed out is that Islam came to be understood in exclusionary and differential terms by both Ottoman elite and statesmen and people like Sheikh Ubeydullah. Therefore, if we do not attend to the ethno-nationalistic tendencies present in modern Islamic interpretations, the diversity in Muslim political thought cannot be explained. This diversity is exemplified by the religious binaries through which Sheikh Ubeydullah describes the Kurds in general as *qowm-e pak din* (the people of true religion) and the Ottoman Turks as *munafiq* (unfaithful disguised as Muslims).¹¹⁵⁴

By the end of the 19th century different ethnic groups increasingly saw Islam through their own ethno-nationalistic prisms. Of course, rapid political changes and the overall volatility of the Muslim world affected the political loyalties of Muslim communities. There is no denying that the Islamic faith remained a fundamental factor affecting Muslim political action in general. However, there was variety of other factors affecting the political stances of Muslim groups. Sometimes Islamic faith, in the face of non-Muslim and colonial presence, as in Sheikh Ubeydullah's case, engendered the complicated issue of double loyalties. Kurdish politics, even after Sheikh Ubeydullah's revolt, reflected this complexity. There were several factors that made the Kurdish relationship with both the Great Powers and the Ottoman state still more complicated. Unlike that of other Muslims, the Kurdish relationship with the Ottomans was very complex, having as much to do with their common history as their common religious faith. In the post-Armenian genocide era, the Kurds lived in complete despair and anxiety. They were frightened by the prospect of an Armenian return and possible British retribution for their

¹¹⁵⁴ See, Nehri, *Tuhfetul Ehabab; Mesnewi Şex Ubeydullah Nehri*, 106-40.

involvement in the 1915 genocide. They had also sustained hundreds of thousands of losses at the hands of joint Armenian and Russian forces during WWI.¹¹⁵⁵ British documents shed light on their enormous fear that left them between the rock of Turkish nationalism and the hard place they thought awaited them in the event of the creation of an Armenian state in the six eastern Ottoman provinces.¹¹⁵⁶

To add to this complexity, some of the Kurdish leaders did not hesitate to express their fear of facing the Armenian fate at the hands of Turkish nationalists.¹¹⁵⁷ A statement by Sheikh Said, who was accused of attempts to revive Ottoman caliphate, reveals the ethno-nationalism in that era's Muslim thought. Sheikh Said declared that the entire Ottoman caliphate was a symbol of "Turkish cunning and deception."¹¹⁵⁸ This shows clearly that the Kurdish Islam, granted there was only one, was no exception to the general rule of carrying the makrs of its socio-political context.

The idea of universal Muslim obedience to the caliphate, frequently shown as a sign of the lack of nationalism among Muslims in earlier periods, is at best a myth. It is, to a great degree, an Orientalist as well as a Kemalist construct. Among the late Ottoman Sultans, Abdülhamid II enjoyed the greatest public religious persona. Those who succeeded him were hardly known to the common people of the Empire. This is because the Caliphate generally remained a ceremonial office in the post-Hamidian era, especially during the CUP reign. From the rise of Mustafa Kemal until its abolishment, the Caliphate increasingly grew weaker. The role

¹¹⁵⁵ online., "Mesopotamia (Review of the Civil Administration). Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia," 58.

¹¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁵⁷ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, 37.

¹¹⁵⁸ To read the Shaikh's letter see: Strohmeier, *Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity: Heroes and Patriots, Traitors and Foes*, 89-90.

of the successors of Abdülhamid was mostly a nominal one. However, even Abdülhamid, the best known and the most popular among the later Caliphs, was not adored. If some of the Kurdish leaders or scholars from afar had any respect for Abdülhamid, one trip to Istanbul would have sufficed for their disillusionment with his Caliphate. A great example of such cases is the famous Kurdish poet, Sheikh Riza Talabani (1842-1909) from Suleimaniye. Talabani penned a poem after visiting Istanbul that best summarizes this discussion:

*Kâsh ke roozî be maydân-e homâyuni rah-dahadam
Tâ Abdülhamid Khân ra beguyam; ey **hamirul mu'min**
Be 'sat-e to **dar khelâf-e** be 'sat-e peyghambar ast
Anta mâ 'ursilta illa **zahrâmatan** lil'âlamîn¹¹⁵⁹*

I wish, one day he allowed my entry into the imperial square
To call Abdülhamid Khan, O! **Jackass of the faithful**,
You're sent for a purpose **opposite to** that of the Prophet,
You're not being sent except as a **trouble for the world**

After hearing this poem, the Minister of Pious Foundations (*awqaf*) summoned Talabani and questioned him if he had written a poem with such content. Knowing the harsh consequences, Talabani changed a few words in his poem and read it to the Minister as:

*Kâsh ke roozî be maydân-e homâyuni raham dahand
Tâ Abdülhamid Khân ra beguyam; ey **amirul mu'min**
Be 'sat-e to **dar vefâq-e** be 'sat-e peyghambar ast
Anta mâ 'ursilta illa **rahmatan** lil'âlamîn¹¹⁶⁰*

I wish, one day he allowed my entry into the imperial square
To call Abdülhamid Khan, O! **Commander of the faithful**,
You're sent for a purpose **harmonious with** that of the Prophet,
You're not being sent except as a **mercy to the world**¹¹⁶¹

As shown earlier, even the Kemalists acknowledged that the '*ulama* of Kurdistan never

¹¹⁵⁹ Ayhan Geverî, "Şêx Riza Telebanî Û Siltan 'Evdilhemîd/ Shaikh Reza Talabani and the Sultan Abdulhamid," *Nûbihar*, no. 106 (2008).

¹¹⁶⁰ Ibid. I am indebted to Ayhan Geverî for sharing his insightful article on Shaikh Reza Talabani with me.

¹¹⁶¹ The last verse is inspired by a verse in the Quran (21/107) on the Prophet of Islam: "[O Muhammad] and We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds."

considered that of the Ottomans' as 'a true caliphate.'

The aim here is to reassert that Islam did not create a unified political collectivity as Islam has historically been understood differently in different socio-political contexts. Islam, even within specific religious denomination such as *Sunnis* and *Shi'is*, has never produced a universally accepted Islamic interpretation.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Ottoman state propagated its Islam among the *Sunnis* to obfuscate the Islam of Others. At the same time, Arab and Kurdish elites each defended the superiority of their own Islamic understanding and practices. In the modern era, as shown above, usually different Muslim communities tied 'the superiority' of their Islam to their ethnicity. At the same time, such claims were used as the basis for the legitimacy of certain collective political demands. These types of exclusionary Islamic interpretations helped communities like the Kurds to either downplay their religious bond with the ethnic Other or made the religious and ethnic boundaries coterminous. Such interpretations of Islam are modern and at the same time nationalistic. In the premodern era, claims to ethnic and religious superiority neither could induce collective political demands or will to the self-rule nor could grant any legitimacy to such demands. This is precisely where exclusionary interpretations of Islam intersect with modern nationalism or become testaments to the fusion of the two. As repeatedly stated, neither nationalism nor religion(s) can be studied in isolation. Religions, whatever their origins may be, are conducive to interpretations. Any interpretation of any religion is human endeavor that is affected by its context. As shown earlier, despite elements of continuity, generally modern interpretations of Islam carry a paradigmatic emblem of nationalism. Rethinking and reinterpretations of Islam are not homogeneous as they bear the mark of their interaction with specific socio-historical contexts. Hence, Islamic religious thought

affected by its entanglements and its reciprocal relation with nationalism. Such a situation in and of itself provides the room for the continuity of Islamic religious thought and its fusion with nationalism.

As was shown earlier, conceiving of nationalism as a modern convention, in its Austinian sense, helps us grasp the malleability of nationalism and the possibility of its fusion with religious thought. If we are able to expand the idea of convention—as illustrated in the case of Sheikh Ubeydullah—we are able to make a better sense of some religio-nationalist utterances in the modern Muslim history. This is the case since if nationalism is a convention according to which an ‘imagined community’ has the right to make ‘the national and the political coterminous,’ then any utterance to this effect is nationalistic. Theoretically, in such a convention a given communal self-referentiality constitutes the ground for the legitimacy of claims to self-rule. Hence, any utterance, religious or otherwise, that ties collective right to the communal self-referentiality is modern, nationalistic and locatable within the paradigm of nationalism. Therefore it is also justified to claim, as this study does, that there existed competing Muslim nationalisms long before WWI in the Ottoman context.

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