



ISSN: 1309 4173 (Online) 1309 - 4688 (Print)

Volume 8 Issue 3, p. 37-55, September 2016/ DOI No: 10.9737/hist.2016322068

## Nationalism and Islam: A Comparative Approach to Ottoman and Tatar Nationalisms

*Milliyetçilik ve İslam: Osmanlı ve Tatar Milliyetçiliklerine Karşılaştırmalı Bir Yaklaşım*

Assoc. Prof. Mustafa GÖKÇEK  
Niagara University, New York, USA

**Abstract:** This article addresses the interaction between nationalism and Islam by means of a comparative analysis of Turkish and Tatar nationalisms during the early twentieth century. It argues that the utilization of multiple identities allows for a mutually inclusive relationship between nationalism and Islam, a reality that was quite clearly observed among the Tatar nationalist intellectuals from Russia. While the Turkish nationalists and traditional Islamist intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire found themselves challenged to accept each other's positions, those Tatar intellectuals who settled in Istanbul and helped to establish and advance Turkish nationalism within the late Ottoman Empire saw no such conflict.

**Keywords:** Tatar, Ottoman, Nationalism, Islam, Turkey

**Öz:** Bu makale milliyetçilik ve İslam arasındaki etkileşimi yirminci yüzyıl başında Türk ve Tatar milliyetçiliklerinin karşılaştırmalı bir analizini yaparak incelemektedir. Makalenin temel argümanı çoklu kimliğin kullanımı İslam ve milliyetçiliğin birbirlerine kucaklayıcı yaklaşımlarını sağlamaktadır. Bu gerçeğin en bariz orneklendirildiği durum ise Rusyalı Tatar milliyetçi aydınlarıdır. Türk milliyetçileri ve geleneksel İslam alimleri Osmanlı'nın son döneminde birbirlerine karşı bir pozisyon takınmışlar, ancak İstanbul'a yerleşen Tatar aydınları Türk milliyetçiliğini güçlendirmeye devam ederken İslam ve milliyetçilik arasında hiçbir çatışma görmemişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tatar, Osmanlı, Milliyetçilik, İslam, Türkiye

### Introduction

Political developments in Muslim-majority nation states constantly remind us of the intricate and delicate relationship that exists between nationalism and Islam. The emergence and later conceptualization of nationalism in the European context led scholars of nationalism to focus on Christianity as the primary religion of analysis. Islam's outright rejection of racial and ethnic discrimination right from its origin caused many scholars to believe that the two were mutually exclusive. However, historical developments, transitions from empires to nation states, and the emergence of nationalist movements in Muslim contexts challenge these assumptions. The collapse of the Soviet Union revealed a series of nation states in Central Asia inhabited by Turkic Muslim peoples. Similarly, the Ottoman Empire was replaced by numerous nation states that are still coping with Islamist and nationalist political and social ideological currents. This article provides a theoretical analysis of nationalism and its interaction with Islam in an attempt to make sense of historical and political clashes among various political and social movements in Muslim lands and within Muslim societies, specifically those that contain Turkish and Tatar nationalisms.



JHS

History  
Studies

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

The early twentieth century witnessed the rise of nationalism among Turkish intellectuals. For example, the Ottoman Empire's Union and Progress Party, despite its prioritization of Islamic identity,<sup>1</sup> provided an avenue for the quick expansion of Turkish nationalist networks after its 1908 coup.<sup>2</sup> Earlier, the 1905 revolution in Russia had had an indirect impact on the rise of nationalism there. The subsequent atmosphere of freedom allowed Russia's Muslim intellectuals to explore ideas of Turkish unity across the Russian Empire and beyond. They closely followed the ideas and initiatives of Turkish nationalists in the Ottoman Empire. Following the Young Turk coup in 1908, many of them travelled to the Ottoman Empire, where they made significant contributions to the development of Turkish nationalism and thus laid the intellectual groundwork for the Turkish Republic, which Atatürk built on the national principle. Simultaneously, the nationalist movement among Russia's Muslims was quickly transformed from Turkish nationalism into sub-ethnic nationalisms along geographic, linguistic, and cultural divides, such as Tatar, Kazakh, and Uzbek nationalisms. Among these, Tatar nationalism emerged as the most vibrant and dynamic, as well as the strongest trend, in its intellectual growth into a nationalist movement.

Following a theoretical discussion of nationalism and Islam, this paper will compare and contrast Turkish and Tatar nationalisms during the early twentieth century. It argues that Muslim intellectuals found creative ways to accommodate and allow nationalism to function among various Muslim nations based on ethnic identity. The rise of nationalist feelings led Muslim individuals to prioritize their ethnic identity over others, including their religious one. Therefore, a multiple identities approach, as exemplified best by the Tatar intellectuals living in the Ottoman Empire, helps us explain the rise of nationalism to the detriment of religious affiliation, but not always understood as being against Islam.

### **Nationalism**

When left undefined, loaded concepts, especially those like *nations* and *nationalism*, lead to misunderstandings. Ernest Gellner, one of the most prominent theoreticians of nation and nationalism, defines nationalism as a "primarily political principal which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."<sup>3</sup> For him, nationalism is a product of industrial social organization. In addition to maintaining that nations are formed as a result of nationalism, he also introduces concepts of high culture vs. low culture. For Gellner, nationalism imposes a "high culture" on the majority of the population, which causes the former "low cultures" to diminish. But his views are not universally applicable, for there are cases even within Europe that disprove them.

While Gellner's theory might seem to be valid for several western European countries, such as France and Germany, the nations of Eastern Europe existed long before the advent of nationalism. Instead of "a high culture," the consequence of some nationalisms (e.g., Serbian, Greek, or Turkish) was the imposition of a low culture over the other low cultures. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, one could even argue that Turkish nationalism enforced a culture to the detriment of the high imperial culture.

For Benedict Anderson, nationality and nationalism are particular kinds of cultural artifacts. Anderson claims that nationalism emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century as a result of the "spontaneous distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces" that, once created, became models that could be used in a great variety of social terrains by a

---

<sup>1</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *Modern Türkiye'nin Oluşumu* (Istanbul: Kaynak, 1999), 52-53.

<sup>2</sup> Feroz Ahmed, *İttihat ve Terakki 1908-1914* (Istanbul: Kaynak, 1995), 186-188.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 1.



**JHS**  
**38**

**History  
Studies**

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

correspondingly wide variety of ideologies.<sup>4</sup> He defines nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” For him, the “imagined” aspect of the definition implies not falsity, but the fact that no member of any nation can know all of the other members of the same nation (or even the majority of them), and yet all of its members feel a national attachment. Besides, as nations have boundaries, they recognize other nations across those boundaries. He further claims that since nations were born during the Age of Enlightenment, they dream of and plan to gain their sovereignty, thereby establishing nation-states.<sup>5</sup> He argues that the cultural origin of the modern nation is located historically at the junction of three developments: a change in the conceptions of time, the decline of religious communities, and the end of dynastic realms. Print-capitalism, or wide-scale book publishing, enabled large communities to think of themselves in new terms. Anderson holds that official nationalisms developed after, and in reaction to, the popular national movements that had been proliferating in Europe since the 1820s.

While this theory brings a quite original perspective to understanding the growth of nationalism, it has several weak points. One of them concerns the nation’s origins and where it really started. It is too reductive to claim that the formation of the imagery of nations comes down to the Enlightenment and the accompanying rivalry with the Catholic church. This approach overlooks the nationality concept in other parts of the world, where people identified themselves and others as a national community far earlier than in Enlightenment-era Europe. Therefore, Anderson’s definition of *nation* is both too political and neglects the more sociological and historical aspect. Further, his image of nationalism as replacing religion is not true for all cases. While it might be understandable in the European context, despite being somewhat too simplistic, in most of the Muslim world there is no evidence to support it. To the contrary, in the Ottoman context the religious authority represented by Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909) was overthrown by a politically nationalist group of intellectuals. This demonstrated their replacement not of religion, but of religious and dynastic authority. On the other hand, the Tatar case paints a different picture. Quite in opposition to Anderson’s theory, in fact, Tatar religious institutions and leading religious figures reinforced nationalism. Şehabeddin Mercani, for instance, the influential Tatar Mufti and the highest Muslim authority in Russia, was the first intellectual to publish a book in Tatar and encouraged the proud use of the word *Tatar* to define oneself. Thus in the Muslim context, the relationship between religion and nationalism is far more complex than Anderson suggests.

Eric Hobsbawm argues that “in some cases an ethnic religion is chosen because a people feels different from neighboring peoples or states.”<sup>6</sup> This is true of the Tatars, for while it was certainly not the primary reason for the strength of their religious identity, being surrounded by Orthodox Russians made it far easier and more practical for them to identify themselves first and foremost as Muslims. Moreover, they never saw a conflict between religion and nationalism, for they perceived such a choice as no more than a matter of prioritizing religion or nationalism. Even though the Tatar nationalists put nationalism above religion in their political discourse, they viewed religion as one of the strongest elements of their national identity, which they defined in response to Orthodox Russian dominance. Thus their strong attachment to religion, a result of being surrounded and dominated by people of another religion, went hand in hand with strong feelings of nationalism.

<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 69.



I argue that at the individual level, nationality could be primordial, like speech or sight. Indeed, individuals (at least most of them) are born into a nation and then raised within its cultural, linguistic, and religious confines. However, if we consider that nations are communities as opposed to individuals, we can make the case that a nation is perennial. A nation can be formed at different stages in time, which could vary by a wide margin. For example, the Jewish nation can be traced back about 4,000 years, whereas Russian historians trace their national history back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century and the American nation arguably only goes back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus the formation of nations is an ongoing process, one that can be likened to a living organism.

Concerning the emergence and growth of nations, I would like to stress several factors. Language is the main factor in the formation of a nation. In other words, language is the first and most important marker between nations, and it is that which helps nations trace their origins back into antiquity. The second major dividing line is religion. A nation using one language could be divided dramatically as a result of a group's conversion to a different religion. Geography is yet another factor, as can be seen in the separation of European peoples in America from their homeland and original nationalities. Differentiation in other various cultural traits occurs only as an outcome of differences in language, religion, and territory. The elite play no role in a nation's formation, but surely do so in the formation and strengthening of nationalism. Thus a nation is a community of individuals or groups that share a sense of unity based upon such commonalities as language, religion, territory, and history.

At the same time, nationalism can be identified as a modern phenomenon, an ideology that seeks to increase national consciousness and peculiarities especially in the political and/or cultural realms. While various types of nationalist movements can be identified in the pre-modern era, certainly the modern era is characterized by political and ideological movements that hope to turn nations into states or states into nation-states. This understanding of the formation of nations and nationalism helps further our understanding and analysis of the growth of nationalism within the Ottoman and Tatar contexts. However, a particular impact is pursued by interjecting Islam into the socio-political context. Various concepts, doctrines, and historical experiences of Islam and Muslim societies reveal a distinct interaction between nationalism and Islamic institutions.

### **Islam and Nationalism**

The controversy surrounding the Islamic view of nationalism is an everlasting one. While some argue that Islam is an impediment to nationalism, others find evidence in the Islamic world that proves the compatibility of Islam and nationalism. Indeed, Islam's scriptural sources provide evidence for both sides. I argue that a thorough analysis of Islamic theology and historical practice indicates that although Islam rejects violence, racism, or oppression based upon national identity, it does recognize the existence of differences in nationalities and allows the continuation of national identity—as long as it is exercised in accordance with the religion's overarching norms. This section first looks at those aspects of Islamic belief that seem to be against the idea of nation-building and then focuses on the Islamic arguments for the nation and nationalism.

In developing a more general understanding of how universal religions pose an impediment to nationalism, Hobsbawm argues that “[t]he characteristic nationalist movements of the late twentieth century are essentially negative, or rather divisive. Hence the insistence on



**JHS**  
**40**

*History*  
*Studies*

*Volume 8*  
*Issue 3*  
*September*  
*2016*

‘ethnicity’ and linguistic differences, each or both sometimes combined with religion.”<sup>7</sup> As he states in his ground-breaking work *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*:

The links between religion and national consciousness can be very close, as the examples of Poland and Ireland demonstrate. However, religion is paradoxical for proto-nationalism and indeed for modern nationalism, which has usually treated it with considerable reserve as a force which could challenge the “nation’s” monopoly claim to its members’ loyalty. The world religions are universal by definition and therefore designed to fudge ethnic, linguistic, political and other differences.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, unity is one of Islam’s most significant objectives. Establishing unity among Muslims, like establishing belief in God’s unity, is considered essential. Certainly one of the revolutionary social aspects of Islam’s impact was its emphasis on the *umma* (Muslim community). Islam created and reinforced a new identity based upon religion and placed this identity at the center of its worldview. From the very early stages, Muslims established a strong community. In Mecca, during the first half of Muhammad’s prophethood, Muslims were mostly weak and lower class, which meant that non-Muslims could easily and freely persecute them. As a result, a common enemy, a strong shared belief in Islam, and collective endurance through hardship both created and strengthened a common identity: Muslimness. This was a revolutionary invention for that time, because all social relations had, until then, been defined according to tribal affiliations. The most powerful group identity was that of the tribe, and social stratification was structured around tribal lineage. An identity based on religion was completely unheard of in the tribal world.

Islamic identity crystallized with Muhammad’s forced migration from Mecca to Medina. Immediately after his arrival, he established a one-on-one brotherhood between the immigrant Meccan Muslims (*muhajirun*) and the Muslims of Medina (*ansar*). The latter group took this brotherhood so seriously that they shared whatever they had with their new brothers, including their homes, property, income, and lands. They even established inheritance relationships, which the Prophet later abolished.

Another aspect of this period, which helped crystallize the new Muslim identity, was the very reason for Muhammad’s migration. The city’s main Arab tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj, were longstanding mutual enemies whose frequent battles weakened both of them. Thus they were desperately looking for a higher authority to stop their wars and establish peace in the community, which would eventually lead to the prosperity of all. Prophet Muhammad’s search for a safe haven in Medina came at the perfect time, and both tribes quickly realized that prioritizing the Islamic identity over the tribal one could end their unending tribal rivalry. The Medina Charter that Muhammad signed with the city’s non-Muslim populations ingeniously placed religion above tribal identities by establishing Muslims, Jews, and other tribes as separate entities and recognizing their rights of jurisdiction within their respective communities.

At the social level, this brotherhood is reinforced in many Quranic verses, among them: “And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favor on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren...” (3:103)<sup>9</sup> and “The

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>9</sup> The English translations are based on Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, 11th ed. (Beltsville, Md.: Amana Publications, 2004).



JHS

41

History  
Studies

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another...” (9:71). The most famous verse in this regard is: “The Believers are but a single Brotherhood: So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and be aware of Allah, that ye may receive Mercy” (49:10). The Prophet himself also reinforced this ideal in many of his recorded sayings (*hadith*):

A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim. He neither oppresses him nor humiliates him nor looks down upon him. Piety is here (and he pointed to his chest three times.). It is evil enough for a Muslim to hold his brother Muslim in contempt. All things of a Muslim are inviolable for another Muslim: his blood, his property, and his honor.<sup>10</sup>

One could find many more examples in the Quran and Hadith collections that emphasize the unity and brotherhood of Muslims as one community. Suffice it to say that the *umma* identity was established so strongly that it came to be the primary identity for all Muslims.

It is equally easy to find references in the Quran and Hadith that recognize tribal and national differences. The most famous such verse in the Quran is:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (49, 13)

In the writings of Muslim scholars on nationalism and international relations with different cultures and peoples, this verse is frequently mentioned and interpreted at length. The emphasis on “tribes and nations” certainly attracts attention. Here, the Quran teaches Muslims that their existence is, just like everything else, Allah’s will. The mentioning of “creation from a single pair of male and a female” might also suggest that while humanity started with Adam and Eve, as their numbers increased human beings became divided into groups and began identifying themselves with tribes and nations. The last phrase in the first part of the verse – “that ye may know each other” (*li ta’rafu* in Arabic)—is especially worth emphasizing because it describes the divine wisdom in creating such entities and has a deeper connotation than just knowing each other. Muslim commentators argue that the word choice here indicates a thorough knowledge of one another, a two-way interaction or a “getting to know” each other, meaning to gain insight regarding one another. The continuation of the verse, which stresses righteousness as the only criterion for superiority in Allah’s sight, negates any claims of superiority based on tribal or national allegiances. This issue is reiterated by Prophet Muhammad in his famous “Farewell Sermon” of 631, in which he reviewed Islam’s major messages:

All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over a white—except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall make legitimate to a Muslim anything which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not therefore, do injustice to yourselves.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Nawawi, Abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Sharaf and Abdassamad Clarke, *The Complete Forty Hadith* [Arba’un al-Nawawiyah.], Rev. with the Arabic texts of the ahadith ed. (London: Ta-Ha, 2000), hadith no. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Hakan Kosova, *A Tribute to the Prophet Muhammad* (Somerset, N.J.: The Light, Inc., 2007).



These statements have frequently been taken as evidence to prove that there is no nationalism in Islam. However, a closer look at the text indicates that the arguments put forward are against all types of racism and discrimination based upon nationality. Islam does not allow Muslims to view nationality as a reason for superiority over others or to take advantage of it to oppress others, for its main concern in this regard is to avoid discrimination. On the other hand, love of one's own nation, allegiance to a nation, and groupings based upon nationality are not at question here. Thus, according to the scriptural messages of Islam, nations exist due to the will of God. The wisdom behind God's creation of them is self-expression, identification, and promotion of dialogue. Islam identifies the religious bond as the primary one among all Muslims; however, this does not negate its recognition of national bonds as social factors.

At this point, it is helpful to bring up Gellner's approach to Islam and nationalism. In his notable *Nations and Nationalism*, he acknowledges the exceptional case of Islam in terms of the emergence of nationalism<sup>12</sup> and points to the ulama as a trans-ethnic, trans-political body or guild of Muslim scholars. At the same time, he argues that "folk Islam" carried a sub-ethnic, sub-political character, which he identifies as high versus low culture. He then develops his contention that this division within Islamic societies actually prepared them for the intrusion of modernity and the shaping of nationalism around high culture. Gellner quite interestingly points out the fact that the Islamic world encountered nationalist ideas during its pre-industrialization stage, a reality that led to a different process of nationalism in which the high culture did not need to secularize, as it did in Europe. Instead, the ulama could develop Islamic support for their nationalist views. Gellner states that certain characteristics of Islam were influential in its long term continuation despite the process of modernization: doctrinal elegance, simplicity, exiguousness, and strict unitarianism.

Adrian Hastings, like Gellner, stresses Islam's universal aspect and notes that it is inhospitable to nationalism because of its all-embracing concept of *umma*, which transcends the nation. He also points out the Islamic centrality of Quranic Arabic, which suppresses any vernacular languages. For Hastings, Christianity and the Church played a key role in the emergence of nationalism, especially the social and educational networks provided by religion and religious institutions.<sup>13</sup>

Anthony Smith, on the other hand, asserts that nationalism could break through the universality of a religion and makes a comparison using nationalisms in the Christian world. He responds to the views of Hastings and Gellner by offering the Catholic Church and Christendom as an example. He states that just as the national awakenings were able to transcend the universal domination of the Catholic Church, neither the primary role of the Arabs nor the centrality of Arabic could prevent a renaissance of Persian ethnicity and language or the rise of Turkish and the Turks within the Muslim world.<sup>14</sup>

While his examples are well chosen, Smith approaches his cases from a mistaken assumption. Especially with his example of the Catholic Church, he assumes that nations flourished against the will and aim of Islam, as if Islam had assigned a primary role to Arabs and Arabic. I contend that quite the opposite is true: His examples of the dominance of Persian language and culture, especially during the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as the Turks' political and cultural influence in the Muslim world indicate that Islam does not prevent nations from

<sup>12</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Nationalism*, 157.



flourishing and sustaining their own national characteristics. It is true that Arabic was and remains respected in the Muslim world because the Quran was revealed in that language. However, while Muslim scholars learned Arabic to excel in the Islamic sciences, non-Arab Muslims were never obliged or required by Islam to learn or speak it. Hence one cannot find any language or national identity throughout the history of Islam that disappeared due to its assimilation with Arab norms. The Islamic principles quoted above from the Quran and Hadith are sufficient evidence that Islam seeks to establish equality among nations and races by emphasizing that “an Arab is not superior to a non-Arab and a non-Arab is not superior to an Arab.” There were differences of opinion among the traditional Islamic scholars as to whether nationalism was “good” and “permissible” or “bad” (i.e., unlawful) from an Islamic legal point of view.

### Types of Nationalism

Interestingly, scholars of nationalism also discuss these types of nationalism. In *The Ideas of Nationalism*, Hans Kohn points out this distinction and argues that each type has different intellectual roots: “In spite of many elements in their thoughts and works to the contrary, Rousseau helped to lay the foundations for the democratic nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Nietzsche those for the fascist nationalism of the twentieth.”<sup>15</sup> Other writers use different concepts to distinguish between positive and negative nationalisms. David Brown, who calls these “two ideal-type forms of nationalism, which are analytically distinct and antithetical in nature” “cultural nationalism” and “civic nationalism,” asserts that each type can be experienced in either good or bad ways.<sup>16</sup>

Other conceptions of different nationalisms eventually separate the destructive and exclusivist form from the more inclusive one. Peter Alter contrasts a liberal democratic concept of the nation to a deterministic one that is undemocratic and irrational.<sup>17</sup> Kohn presents western European nationalism as a predominantly political occurrence connected with individual liberty from the eastern nationalism, including German, Russian, and Indian, which developed in politically and socially backward societies in an excessive and militant form.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Calhoun emphasizes constitutional patriotism as a way to eliminate the fear of bad nationalism and argues that multiple thin identities, such as Islamism, can develop new social imaginaries and solidarity.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, identifying the various forms of nationalism as well as their contrasts with religion may become meaningful and acquire a certain degree of practicality if analyzed through the conceptual framework of multiple identities.

### Multiple Identities

Analyzing nationalism within Muslim societies necessitates deconstructing multilayered complexities that can only be truly identified from within. Islam sometimes plays the role of a discursive tool, but always contributes to the reshaping of social semiotics. Therefore, nationalism in a Muslim society, no matter how secular the movement or the cadres leading it are, negotiates the communal and individual spheres of identity with Islam. Muslims constantly negotiate and navigate among the several identities available to them. Among other factors, Islam is the main dynamic that shapes identities, which allows Muslims to simultaneously acquire and shift through multiple identities. This depiction is quite contrary to

---

<sup>15</sup> Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 238.

<sup>16</sup> David Brown, “Are there Good and Bad Nationalisms?” *Nations and Nationalism*, no. 5 (1999), 281-302.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Alter, *Nationalism* [Nationalismus] (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), 1-20.

<sup>18</sup> Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 325-331.

<sup>19</sup> Craig Calhoun, “Imagining Solidarity, Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere,” *Public Culture*, no. 14 (2002), 147-171.



JHS

44

History  
Studies

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016



the popular and orientalist western scholarly images of Muslims as static, homogenous, monolithic, and flat individuals. James Wilce quite elaborately points out this argument and states that in Muslim societies “[e]ven nationalisms...are contested and refracted by gender and by local forces.”<sup>20</sup> Within this multilayered and multidimensional structure offered by Islam, Muslims find it quite expedient to express both local and universal identities.

On the one hand, Muslims handle a set of doctrines and practices that are universal in nature, whereas on the other they are challenged to develop local identities with respect to these universal qualities. As Bowen mentions, “Muslims develop identities in ways that counterpose elements marked as ‘religious’ to elements marked as ‘cultural’, ‘economic,’ or ‘modern’ should not be surprising but needs to be said....”<sup>21</sup> However, the universal and local dimensions of a Muslim identity are inseparable, for any local identities are shaped or influenced, if not created, by what is meant by being “Muslim.”

Islam, as an ascribed or “given” identity, carries the potential for creating a global community of Muslims who share the universal and basic tenets of faith and religious practice. However, since identities are shaped along the way by many historical, political, and social processes, the local dimension is complementary to the universal. As Schwedler rightfully proclaims, it is quite impossible to talk about a shared universal Muslim identity that would have the same mobilizing effect and social or political power in different parts of the world.<sup>22</sup> Adding the ethnic category to the generic title of “Muslim” only helps clarify the details of the Muslim identity; it does not delimit it. For instance, expressing the Turkishness of a “Turkish Muslim” would, by definition, imply the entire cultural, social, historical, and political factors that have molded the identity of that individual or community, whereas just the Muslim dimension would leave that individual or community with an overly generic identification. Therefore, the multiple identities that accompany the Muslim identity create a mutual contingency and carry an explanatory value for the corresponding ethnic and religious identities.

Bernard Lewis, in his *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*, argues that while in general social, economic, and gender-related factors are quite important in the development of identities and loyalties in a society, in the Middle East it was the ascribed, or involuntary and compulsory identities, that determined people’s identities:

The primary identities are those acquired at birth. These are of three kinds: The first is by blood, that is to say, in ascending order, the family, the clan, the tribe, developing into the ethnic nation. The second is by place... This may mean the village or neighborhood, district or quarter, province or city, developing in modern times into the country. The third...is the religious community, which may be subdivided into sects. For many, religion is the only loyalty that transcends local and immediate bonds.<sup>23</sup>

For Lewis, religion, as a primary and transcending characteristic of Middle Eastern identity, played such a strong role that until recently religion was, for Muslims, “the determinant identity, the focus of loyalty and, not less important, the source of authority.”<sup>24</sup> He argues that these old and deep-rooted identities were only challenged and changed in modern

<sup>20</sup> James Wilce, “Communicating Multiple Identities in Muslim Communities: An Introduction,” *Ethos*, no. 26 (1998), 115-119.

<sup>21</sup> John Bowen, “What is ‘Universal’ and ‘Local’ in Islam?” *Ethos*, no. 26 (1998), 258-261.

<sup>22</sup> Jillian Schwedler, “Islamic Identity: Myth, Menace, or Mobilizer?” *SAIS Review*, no. 21 (2001), 1-17.

<sup>23</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (London: Phoenix, 1999), 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.



JHS

45

History  
StudiesVolume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

times by the introduction and domination of European concepts and values. Lewis rightly points out the fact that in Europe the word *Turk* had a religious connotation, but then contradicts himself by stating that “[d]uring the centuries-long confrontation between the states of Europe and the Ottoman Empire, the Europeans always saw and discussed their relations in terms of Austrians, Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen, and other nationalities versus Turks; the Turks saw it in terms of Muslims versus Christians.”<sup>25</sup> While Islam certainly strove to place itself above all other bonds and allegiances, as is evident in the examples Lewis himself provides, identifying oneself primarily by religious affiliation was not unique to Muslim communities.

Lewis emphasizes the Ottoman legacy as the main element responsible for the heavily religious identification of the peoples once ruled by the empire.<sup>26</sup> The countries that emerged after its decline continue that legacy. Lewis gives the non-Muslim examples to reveal this point more strikingly. For example, while Greece was negotiating with the European Union, its delegation clashed with the authorities in Brussels over the addition of a line for religion. While this was perceived as contrary to European democratic practice, the Greeks insisted upon expressing their religious identity on their identity cards because religion is an essential part of their identity.

Even in the former Yugoslavia, communist rule had to distinguish between “muslims,” with a lower case “m” for religious affiliation, and “Muslims,” with a capital “m” denoting a separate nationality.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, an eye witness of the Serbs’ massacres of Muslim Bosnians remarked that the Serbs would express their goal of sending the Muslims back to Central Asia where they had come from, a blunt confusion of ethnic Turkish identity with religious identity. The Ottoman legal system and social practice of identifying its subjects according to their religious affiliation left a long and deep legacy not only in the Muslims, but also in all of its subjects. This legacy had unique consequences for the emergence of nationalism in these lands and its negotiation with religious identity. In the empire’s non-Muslim communities, nationalism conveniently cooperated and collaborated with the religious institutions against the common enemy: Muslim Turks. However, Turkish nationalism found it much harder to cooperate with the empire’s Islamic legacy.

The above examples demonstrate that religious identity held the primary role, especially among the peoples of the empire. This should not be understood as the absence of ethnic identification, for various communities in the Ottoman-ruled Middle East incorporated several layers of identities simultaneously. A Muslim was at the same time an Ottoman and a Turk, Kurd, or Arab. An Orthodox Christian could also identify himself/herself as simultaneously Serbian and Ottoman.

The introduction of nationalism posed a challenge to Ottoman society: a change in the prioritization of these identities. While in the past a Greek would accept Orthodoxy and being an Ottoman subject as identities before Greekness, the nationalist movement put one’s ethnic affiliation first. In the same way, Turkish nationalists refrained from eliminating their Muslim identities by reducing religion to the level of individual spiritual choice or to a matter of culture and upholding their Turkishness as the main determinant when it came to forging a common political and social identity. Thus the “imagined community” shifted from one that was predominantly identified by religion to one primarily identified in terms of an ethnic community.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



**JHS**

**46**

**History  
Studies**

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

Lewis also discusses “nation” as a concept and how in different linguistic backgrounds different terms are adopted to express the same meaning.<sup>28</sup> He mentions the word “milla” as one such concept. In classical Arabic this word meant “religious community.” Persian adopted it as “millat” and used it in its Quranic meaning of “religious community.” Turkish also adopted it, along with other Arabic words, and in the Ottoman system of administration it came to denote the officially recognized religious communities: the Muslims (*millet-i hakime*), the Orthodox, the Jews, and the Armenians.

It would have been less problematic if the empire’s early nationalists had adopted or invented another word, instead of adapting “millet” to mean “nation” with an ethnic connotation, for using the term for “religious community” to express an ethnic community with a political agenda engendered what I would call an everlasting conceptual chaos. While many European nations could quite easily trace back their modern national formation to the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and distinguish it from the pre-existing ethnic communities, the history of the Turkish nation, or *Türk milleti*, with its unique language, culture, and history, can be traced back thousands of years. This poses an enormous challenge for the scholars of Turkish nationalism, for how are they to distinguish the old Turkish nation from the Turkish nation in its modern meaning?

This terminological problem reveals itself even in today’s political and scholarly debates. While a traditional Islamic approach to Turkish nationalism would encompass the Ottoman and Seljuk Turks in its ancestry and could be called “cultural nationalism,” a more secular and Republican approach would include only modern Turkish Republic and its subjects as the qualifiers of the Turkish nation, which can be called “civic nationalism.” The former would take either the blood relationship as the sole bond and emphasize a more ethnic-racial nationalism, or else emphasize the Turks’ cultural and historical heritage and be more tolerant to and inclusive of other nations and minorities. The latter (civic) form of nationalism, however, stresses the Turkish Republic as the sole legitimate representation of the modern Turkish nation and would accept citizenship as the common bond that holds all Turks together. This approach would hardly recognize the existence of ethnic minorities and would justify the denial of minority rights and the suppression of any opposition, Islamist or otherwise, on the basis of civic nationalism. The consequences of this conceptual chaos reveal themselves in scholarly and political discussions of Turkish nationalism and history as a perpetual miscommunication and a growing mistrust between secular civic nationalists and religious nationalists.

### Turkish vs. Tatar Nationalisms

In his *Nationalism*, Anthony Smith defines nationalism as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation.’”<sup>29</sup> Thus he ties ideology to movement; identifies its goals as maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity; and recognizes those cases in which nationalism precedes nations. Smith defines nation as “a named human community occupying a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members.” He differentiates *ethnie*, or ethnic communities, with the following definition: “a named human community connected to a homeland, possessing common myths of ancestry, shared memories, one or more elements of shared culture, and a measure of solidarity, at least among

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 81-87.

<sup>29</sup> Anthony Smith, *Nationalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 9.



JHS

47

History  
Studies

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

the elites.”<sup>30</sup> Smith emphasizes the occupation of a homeland, possessing a public culture, standardized national history, single economy, and common rights and duties for members as the differences between a nation and an *ethnie*. He argues that a “multiple identities” approach is valid for individuals, but should not be applied to larger communities.

While it is true that multiple identifications occur at the individual level, I contend that large communities such as nations can also have multiple identities. The shift from one identity to another would occur at a much faster pace on the individual level, while at the national level it could take a few decades for one identity to rise to the top of the “list” of identities. Historical breaking points, leading figures, and elites could have a catalyzing effect on the shift’s pace, but those identities would already be on the list. For instance, in the Ottoman Empire an individual would identify himself/herself as an Ottoman when meeting a foreigner. Religious identity would come to the forefront if the other person belonged to another faith. And if two individuals shared the same faith, then their ethnic identity would be the main source of recognition. Thus aside from Ottomanness, religious identity was the primary identity; however, ethnic identity still existed at a lower level in the stratification of identities. This was also true for the Tatars, who emphasized their Muslimness at a much higher level because for them it was the major distinction between themselves and the surrounding peoples. Yet they were simultaneously Turks and Tatars.

Kemal Karpat points this out quite eloquently in his *Politicization of Islam*. After mentioning Anderson’s suggestion that individuals within an imagined community acknowledge that a political structure links them to a community that is wider than just lineage, Karpat argues that while Ottomanism and Islamism set the framework for the community’s political link, the elites chose to emphasize only the ethnic link as the new community’s exclusive identity.<sup>31</sup> Within this context, he alludes to the existence of multiple identities and the shift from one of them to another, or, in other words, prioritizing an identity that used to exist but at a lower level on the identity list. For the Turkish nationalist elite, Islam was not to be a state ideology or a foreign policy strategy, but rather a necessary cultural and spiritual ingredient of the national culture. Religion was viewed as a matter of individual choice and disposition.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, we notice that in the Tatar case religion was quite influential in developing their national consciousness, for their initial means of self-identification came through religious identity. Political activism among the Tatars started under the same roof with all of Russia’s Muslims. The congresses, in which national consciousness formed its own agenda and turned into a political and cultural movement, were referred to as “All Russian Muslim Congresses.” At the same time, in this case the only Muslim minority in that vast empire was composed of Turkic peoples, and the Turks’ major commonality, beyond language, was religion. Even when Kazan Tatars influenced the rise of *jadidism*, the Islamic reform movement among Muslims of Russia, among the Kazakhs, the primary motive of interaction was religion.<sup>33</sup> This commonality of religion was stronger than linguistic similarities, because the sometimes sharp differences in accent made it difficult for Russia’s Turks to identify language as a commonality. The greatest difference, the two linguistic branches of Turkish (i.e., Kipchak and

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>31</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 402.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 405.

<sup>33</sup> Emin Özdemir, “Kazak Kültürel Hayatında Tatarların Etkisi ve Kazak Ceditçiliğinin Gelişimi,” *Bilig*, no. 48 (2009): 157-174.



**JHS**  
**48**

**History  
Studies**

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

Oghuz), was a major obstacle in utilizing language as the main parameter of a unified identity. This should be emphasized as a possible reason for the short period of a more general Turkish nationalism among Russia's Muslims as compared to religious self-identification and the various sub-ethnic nationalisms (e.g., Tatar, Kazakh, Uzbek vs. Turkish).

The transition from a primarily religious identification to a national one occurred first in the idea of Turkishness. The more nationalist intellectuals, such as Gaspirali, supported and worked to strengthen a national consciousness around Turkishness, one that would bring together all Turks from the Balkans to the Uyghurs of Eastern Turkistan (the present-day Chinese province of Xinjiang). However, these efforts and the rise of Turkish nationalism very quickly faced a rival, sub-ethnic nationalism, especially from the Tatars. A shift of intellectual emphasis from the universality of religion to the particularities of nationalism resulted in further divisions along linguistic, geographical, and, to a certain extent, cultural lines. Although these differences were minimal in comparison to their differences with other nations, still other factors made it impossible for Russia's Muslims to develop a common identity of Turkishness by 1917, among them the vastness of geography, the younger generations' inability to communicate in a common language, and an increasing emphasis on cultural differences. The course of events, which naturally favored nationalist sentiments to the detriment of religious ones, gave rise to a strong Tatar nationalism that revived after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The Turks of the Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, went through a far different experience as regards the development of Turkish nationalism. Sultan Abdulhamid was the first Ottoman sultan to use the title "caliph," meaning that he claimed political authority over all Muslims, both publicly and in international affairs. Thus he sought to present Islam as the unifying identity, a quite practical and efficient approach designed to help hold together at least the Muslim parts of the empire. In addition, this status afforded him leverage in international affairs due to the fact that he was representing the world's Muslims at a time when the empire had earned the nickname "The Sick Man of Europe." The growing Young Turk nationalist elite, however, was quite critical of the status quo and, having adopted nationalism as its major ideology, fiercely criticized Abdulhamid and his traditional Islamic policies. The Young Turks' rival in Turkey was Islamism and the Ottomans. For Turkish nationalism to prevail, Islam as a unifying ideology had to be downplayed and the symbolic significance of the Ottoman leadership, personified in the sultan, had to be reduced.

For Tatar nationalists, their rival was the Turkish nationalists whom Russia had conveniently labeled as "pan-Turkists." But Islam has always been an indispensable aspect of Tatar national identity, perhaps due to the lack of any rival to Tatar nationalism with any kind of pressing religious ideology or authority in the Tatar context. Turkish nationalists have had a far more difficult relation with religion due to the ideological competition at the origin of the modern state. This could be a good indicator of why the newly established Turkish Republic's official nationalist ideology was so critical of the Ottomans and quickly abolished the caliphate. The tension between Islam and its representation at the official level, an ongoing debate within Turkey, is conducted through the discourse of secularism. A closer look at the discussions of the late Ottoman intellectuals, especially those who moved from Russia to Istanbul, provides a clearer picture of the difference between Turkish and Tatar nationalisms as well as their approach to Islam. The following section will address the life and views of Halim Sabit, a Kazan Tatar intellectual who lived in Istanbul and contributed to the intellectual discussions of Turkish nationalism.



JHS

49

History  
Studies

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

### Halim Sabit: A Turkish Nationalist of Kazan Tatar Origin

Ziya Gokalp was the leading ideologue behind Turkish nationalism, but it was Sabit who provided the Islamic justification for his new sociological framework. Sabit, one of the most active but forgotten members of the intelligentsia in the late Ottoman Empire, deserves special attention. First, he was among those Muslim intellectuals of Russia who immigrated to the empire and were actively involved in the intellectual debates as well, later on, in the construction of the Turkish Republic. Besides, he was quite productive in terms of political and intellectual activities and in continuously publishing journals and books, especially during the period of Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) rule. His Kazan Tatar background and education in both Kazan and Istanbul enabled him to mold Islamic and nationalist tendencies in his philosophy. Through his multiple identities, Sabit was able to approach Turkish nationalist problems from an Islamic perspective and create a religious legitimacy for the nationalist movement at a time when many traditionalist intellectuals were severely condemning any nationalist tendencies.

A reflection of his shifting multiple identities could be observed in how he signed his articles. He signed his Istanbul publications as “Kazanlı Halim Sabit” (Halim Sabit of Kazan), whereas he signed his articles on Islam and Justice, published in *Şura*, as “M. Halim Sabit İstanbuli.” In Russia, Sabit identified himself by his connection to Istanbul, while in Istanbul what distinguished him was his Kazan Tatar background. Although he spent most of his life in Istanbul, he maintained close ties with other Muslims of Russia and especially the Kazan Tatars. Within the family he proudly continued Tatar traditions. For example, he would anger his wife by joking about her Mishar (a sub-ethnic identity of Tatars) accent.<sup>34</sup> Sabit saw no conflict among his Ottoman, Turkish, Tatar identities, for he considered them as helpful discursive tools that identified and emphasized the particularities of his own individual qualities.

His travel notes, published in *Türk Yurdu* as “Altaylara Seyahat” (“Journey to the Altay Mountains”), abound with examples of how he used his Tatar and Ottoman identities interchangeably in different contexts. The symbolic visibility of identity plays a crucial role in defining which one of the multiple identities comes to play the primary role. In this case, while making his way from Odessa to Samara he proudly wore his *fes*, the Ottoman headgear, which conveniently started conversations. Not only the Muslim Turks, but also the Russians, were eager to talk with him about Istanbul. Interestingly, he noted that the average Russian had a degree of goodwill for the Ottomans that reached to the level of sincerity. However, Sabit was more interested in meeting and conversing with Muslim Turks, and took advantage of every opportunity to do so. And so he would intentionally wear the *fes* to draw attention to his Ottoman identity and thus provide an excuse for others to approach him.<sup>35</sup>

Sabit was amazed at the interest displayed by the lay people in the Ottoman Empire. Even in small villages where there were only elementary schools, the villagers would gather around him and constantly and enthusiastically ask him questions regarding the empire. His own explanation of this keen interest is probably more interesting. Sabit questioned the source of this sense of close attachment of the folk living in a small village in Simbir to the Ottoman lands: “What kind of a power inspired this sense to them? Is it the blood relationship or sincere brotherhood that awakens such high aims?”<sup>36</sup> He concluded that both were influential. This

---

<sup>34</sup> Halim Şibay Tuğsavul archive.

<sup>35</sup> Halim Sabit [Şibay], “Altaylara Doğru,” *Türk Yurdu* 2 (1328), 402-407.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



**JHS**  
**50**

**History**  
**Studies**

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

question and answer reveals Sabit's approach to the role of nationalism and religion: they are both influential.

Sabit's Ottoman identity would emerge in different contexts in various ways. He describes how a rich Muslim once asked him whether he should send his children to Istanbul to receive an education. The father's main concern was to provide his children a good religious and national education. Like many others, Sabit asserted, this father did not want his children to get the wrong moral education in Russian schools. He had his own concerns about the quality of education in Istanbul, but preferred to remain silent in response to the passionate requests for his suggestions.

In his travelogue, Sabit also reminisced about his past and background. In a discussion of his great ancestor Şibay Babay, Sabit (who later chose Şibay as his family name) narrated Şibay Babay's struggle against the Russians, his flight from them after the collapse of the Bulgar government, how he settled in an area beyond Russian control, and how later on his property and land in his hometown was returned to him by the Russian government.<sup>37</sup> Sabit always held strong feelings about his origin and Tatar ancestry and therefore remained proud of his background. He never saw any contradiction in this regard, even when prioritizing his Ottoman identity.

Another factor that helped connect the Turks of the Ottoman and Russian empires was the constant theme of the Ottoman Empire. Sabit's pride in the Ottoman aspect of his identity often helped him gain the sympathy and respect not only of the local Turkish Muslims, but also of the Russians and even Russian officials. Thus, while building on the interaction between the Russian and Ottoman peoples, Sabit utilized his multiple identities – Ottoman, Turkish, Kazan Tatar, and Muslim—comfortably, freely exchanging one for another whenever doing so helped him identify himself in a different light. His self-presentation as an Ottoman in the Russian realm and as a Kazan Tatar in the Ottoman realm implies that the main purpose of his doing so was to emphasize his individual difference. Consequently, he is an example of using one's multiple identities to get to know the "other" better.

Sabit's most profound contribution was his editorship of *İslam Mecmuası* (*The Journal of Islam*, 1914-1918), which became a venue for nationalist discussions and its Islamic justifications. A common view expressed by most of the journal's traditionalist authors, who one way or another touched upon the issue of the Muslim world's decline, was that Islam should be revived and explored in its original form.<sup>38</sup> They denied the idea, mostly defended by the westerners, that Islam itself was the cause of backwardness. For them, Islam should be purified from all of the superstitions and fallacious practices that had entered into it after *asr-ı saadet* (the period of happiness, namely, when Prophet Muhammad was ruling the Muslim community). The original sources of Islam, the Quran and Sunnah, should be studied directly and interpreted from the perspective of contemporary issues. Abdürreşid (most probably Abdürreşid İbrahim) states that "[w]hile today we admit the decline of the nations of Islam, religion is yet what it was at the beginning of Islam."<sup>39</sup>

*Şeyhülislam* Musa Kazım Efendi's solution to this decline was to revive brotherhood among the Muslims. In his article "Islam and Progress," he mentioned tribalism as an impediment for the establishment of brotherhood in a society:

<sup>37</sup> Halim Sabit [Şibay], *Altaylara Doğru*, 432-437.

<sup>38</sup> M. Şemseddin, Musa Kazım, Abdürreşid, Süruriddin bin Miftahüddin, and Halim Sabit all have similar approaches on this point.

<sup>39</sup> Abdürreşid, "İnna nahnü nezzelnezzikra ve inna lehu le hafızun," *İslam Mecmuası* 4 (19 September 1334): 1166.



Similarly, there will not be a trace of brotherhood among nations, as long as it is not forbidden from enmity, hostility, gossip, slander, lying, dissension, division, sedition, mischief, gender or tribal claims. Therefore it is not possible for such a nation to survive.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, according to him, eliminating those acts and behaviors that cause enmity and division within society and among Muslim nations and thereby establishing unity among the Muslims was vital for progress. This idea that tribalism should be forbidden in order to establish brotherhood in a nation attracted the attention of Nüzhet Sabit of the journal *Takip ve Tenkit*.<sup>41</sup> Babanzade Ahmed Naim wrote a long article in which he reacted to Nüzhet Sabit's defense of nationalism<sup>42</sup> and distinguished between "pure Turkists" (*halis Türkçü*) and "Turkist-Islamists" (*Türkçü-İslamcı*).<sup>43</sup> He fiercely criticized the pure Turkists, whom he blamed for trying to replace Islam with a new faith and for attempting to establish faithlessness, for he held Turkism and Islamism to be mutually exclusive. In response to the Turkists' argument that Turkism could also save Islam, Naim proclaimed that the ideal of Islam could save the Turks, given that a Turk could be served not because he was Turkish, but because he was Muslim.

Naim's approach was more friendly toward the group he called "Turkist-Islamists." He tried to convince its members that Turkism does not help Islam and that it is unreasonable to serve Islam through nationalism. He asked them to give up having two meccas: Turan and the Kaaba. His criticism of nationalist Turks gives the impression that he viewed any kind of nationalist feeling as unacceptable on Islamic terms. However, he also expressed an acceptable version of nationalism: "National zeal is forbidden and denounced. But, in which way? If a person shows zeal towards his nation only because it is his nation, it is evil. If he helps his nation in a rightful way and showing enmity towards others then it is, to the contrary, commendable."<sup>44</sup> This indicates that despite the intolerance Naim showed toward nationalists, even he admits that a certain type of nationalism is acceptable and even "commendable" in Islamic law. This approach supports the argument that Islam distinguishes between good and bad types of nationalism and considers a non-violent, non-supremacist type of nationalism an acceptable ideology.

Ahmed Agayef (Ağaoğlu), another Muslim intellectual from Russia, challenged Naim's criticism of Turkists in the Turkist publication *Türk Yurdu*<sup>45</sup> by focusing on the same Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions to defend nationalism. He contends that the Islamic sources condemn "zeal" (*asabiyet*), not nationhood, and severely rejects Naim's claim that the Turkists wish to replace Islam with faithlessness. Agayef argues that "the Turkish youth that showed indifference to religion until 4-5 years ago has now come closer to religion, became religious. It couldn't be any other way anyway."<sup>46</sup> Agayef also rejects Naim's classification of Turkists and Turkist-Islamists.

---

<sup>40</sup> Musa Kazım, "İslam ve Terakki," *İslam Mecmuası*, no. 1 (1329), 76. In Ottoman: "Keza bir millet adavetten, husumetten, gybetten, buhtandan, yalandan, nifak ve şikaktan, tefrika, fitne ve fesaddan, iddia-i cinsiyet ve kavmiyetden şiddetle men edilmezse o millet arasında uhuvvetden eser bulunmaz. Binaenaleyh öyle bir milletin yaşaması da kabil olmaz." The connotation of this quote on nationalism will be discussed in a separate section.

<sup>41</sup> Nüzhet Sabit, "Mecmualardan: İslam Mecmuası," *Takip ve Tenkit*, no. 1 (1330), 48.

<sup>42</sup> Ahmed Naim, "İslam'da Dava-i Kavmiyet," *Sebilürreşad*, no. 12 (1330), 114-128.

<sup>43</sup> Ahmed Naim is probably the first to call *İslam Mecmuası* a Turkist-Islamist publication. He refers to the *Türk Yurdu* journal as "pure Turkists."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Ahmed Agayef, "İslam'da Dava-i Kavmiyet," *Türk Yurdu*, no. 6 (1330), 2321.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2322.



**JHS**  
**52**

**History  
Studies**

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016



Ruhi Güler rightly points out that although *İslam Mecmuası* was responsible for this debate, it was not involved in it.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, despite its nationalist tendencies, *İslam Mecmuası* chose not to respond to or challenge former *şeyhulislam* Musa Kazım Efendi's position on eliminating nationalism and also refrained from defending him against the nationalist pressure of Nüzhet Sabit. Naim's outright criticism of nationalism did receive a response from *Türk Yurdu*, although his immediate audience should have been *İslam Mecmuası*. The latter publication's neutral stance could be the result of personal connections, for Halim Sabit was on good terms with Kazım Efendi. In fact, he joined the committee on madrasa reform at the latter's invitation. Besides, his series of *Ameli İlmihal* books was a consequence of Kazım Efendi's positive view of Halim Sabit.<sup>48</sup> Given all of this, it would have been tremendously impolite for Halim Sabit to publish a criticism of him in *İslam Mecmuası*.

Another point worth emphasizing is Agayef's defense of the religious aspect of Turkish nationalism. A significant portion of his argument was based on the idea that Turkish nationalism helped establish and even revive religious feelings among its followers. Agayef believed that the nationalism supported by the Turkists brought its followers closer to Islam, rather than replacing religious feelings with nationalist ones. A similar argument is expressed by Yusuf Akçura, a leading Kazan Tatar intellectual who actively led the development of Turkish nationalism in the late Ottoman Empire and contributed to the formation of the Turkish Republic under Atatürk. His article "Three types of Policy" (*Üç tarz-ı siyaset*) published in 1904 in Cairo is considered to be one of the founding documents of Turkish nationalism.<sup>49</sup> In his lectures on European Political History at the Law School at Ankara University Yusuf Akçura discussed the historical development of the religious and national identity among the Muslims of Russia. He made an interesting analogy between the Muslims in Russia and the religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire: "This situation is an exact parallel to the individual attachment of Christian minorities ruled by the Ottoman Turks to Greek, Slav, Armenian churches. As among the southern Christians, among the northern Turks, religion, houses of worship and religious guides became the guardian of nationality for a certain period of time."<sup>50</sup> Thus, the Russian Muslim intellectuals' experience and identity definition made such a tolerant and inclusive approach possible.

### Conclusion

Both traditional Islamic and modern European interpretations of nationalism have viewed Islam and nationalism as mutually exclusive. However, the use of multiple identities in various contexts to bring numerous ethnic or religious identifications forward allows individuals in Muslim-majority countries to identify themselves both by nationality and religion. As exemplified by Halim Sabit and Ahmed Agayef, the Muslims of Russia did not consider nationalism to necessarily be in competition with religion. In other words, Turkism did not have to replace Islamism. To the contrary, Turkism included Islam within itself as one of its most significant traits. The intolerance of Ottoman Turkish intellectuals of different ideological camps is quite clear in the approach of Naim, who practically accused Turkists of infidelity.

<sup>47</sup> Ruhi Güler, "İslam Mecmuası" (1914-1918) ve İçeriği, (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Istanbul University, 1995), 57.

<sup>48</sup> Halim Sabit's son, in his notes on his father's biography, indicates that Musa Kazım asked Halim Sabit to prepare the book series for schools. Halim Şibay Tuğsavul's archive.

<sup>49</sup> Yusuf Akçura, Ali Kemal, and Ahmet Ferit, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1976).

Also see, Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri 1895-1908* (Istanbul: İletisim, 2000), 275-278.

<sup>50</sup> Yusuf Akçuraoğlu, *Zamanımız Avrupa Siyasi Tarihi (5 İnci Tedris Senesi)* (Ankara: Yeni Gün, 1929-1930), 238.



JHS

53

History  
Studies

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

In the view of Ottoman Turks, the rise of Turkism could only weaken Islamism because it had no other meaning than that of abandoning the vast number of non-Turkish Muslim peoples, the lands of the empire, and the decline of Islam among Turks. For the Muslims of Russia, however, national and religious identification were one and the same thing and therefore Turkism could only result in a constructive reformation of a Turkish state, one that would include and save the Turkish Muslim peoples of Russia. On the other hand, for the Turks of the multinational Ottoman Empire who had experienced the nationalist revolts and separations in the Balkans and elsewhere, any emphasis on national identity meant the dissolution of the empire and, even worse, the collapse of the caliphate. Consequently, the non-traditionalist Ottoman intelligentsia mostly became westernists who blamed Islam for the empire's backwardness. In sum, the contributions of Turkic Muslim intellectuals from Russia made a Turkish nationalist approach, one that was both tolerant toward and inclusive of Islam, possible.

### Bibliography

- Abdürreşid. "İnna Nahnü Nezzelnezzikra Ve İnna Lehu Le Hafizun." *İslam Mecmuası* no. 4 (1334): 1166.
- Agayef, Ahmed. "İslam'da Dava-i Kavmiyet." *Türk Yurdu* no. 6 (1330): 2321.
- . "İslam Aleminde Görülen İnhitatın Sebepleri." *İslam Mecmuası* 1, no. 1 (1329): 54-58.
- Ahmad, Feroz. *Modern Türkiye'nin Oluşumu*. Istanbul: Analiz, 1999.
- . *İttihat ve Terakki 1908-1914*. Istanbul: Analiz, 1995.
- Akçura, Yusuf, Ali Kemal, and Ahmet Ferit. *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1976.
- Akçuraoğlu, Yusuf. *Zamanımız Evropa Siyasi Tarihi (5 İnci Tedris Senesi)*. Ankara: Yeni Gün, 1929-1930.
- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, 11th ed. Beltsville, Md.: Amana Publications, 2004.
- Alter, Peter. *Nationalism* [Nationalismus]. London: Edward Arnold, 1989.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Bowen, John. "What is 'Universal' and 'Local' in Islam?" *Ethos* no. 26 (1998): 258-261.
- Brown, David. "Are there Good and Bad Nationalisms?" *Nations and Nationalism* no. 5 (1999): 281-302.
- Calhoun, Craig. "Imagining Solidarity, Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere." *Public Culture* no. 14 (2002): 147-171.
- Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.
- Güler, Ruhi. "*İslam Mecmuası*" (1914-1918) ve İçeriği. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Istanbul University, 1995.
- Halim Sabit [Şibay]. "Altaylara Doğru." *Türk Yurdu* no. 2, (1328): 402-407.
- . "Altaylara Doğru." *Türk Yurdu* no. 2 (1328): 432-437.



**JHS**  
**54**

**History  
Studies**

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016

- Hastings, Adrian. *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Karpat, Kemal H. *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Kazım, Musa. "İslam ve Terakki." *İslam Mecmuası* no. 1 (1329): 74-76.
- Kohn, Hans. *Pan-Slavism: Its History and Ideology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1960.
- Kosova, Hakan. *A Tribute to the Prophet Muhammad*. Somerset, N.J.: The Light, Inc., 2007.
- Lewis, Bernard. *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*. London: Phoenix, 1999.
- Mardin, Şerif. *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri 1895-1908*. İstanbul: İletisim, 2000.
- Naim, Ahmed. "İslam'da Davaya Kavmiyet." *Sebilürreşad* no. 12 (1330): 114-128.
- Nawawi, Abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Sharaf and Abdassamad Clarke. *The Complete Forty Hadith* [Arba'un al-Nawawiyah.]. Rev. with the Arabic texts of the ahadith ed. London: Ta-Ha, 2000.
- Özdemir, Emin. "Kazak Kültürel Hayatında Tatarların Etkisi ve Kazak Ceditçiliğinin Gelişimi." *Bilig* no. 48 (2009): 157-174.
- Sabit, Nüzhet. "Mecmualardan: İslam Mecmuası." *Takip ve Tenkit* no. 1 (1330): 48.
- Schwedler, Jillian. "Islamic Identity: Myth, Menace, or Mobilizer?" *SAIS Review* no. 21 (2001): 1-17.
- Şemseddin, M. "İslam'da İnhitat ve İntibah-I." *İslam Mecmuası* no. 2 (1331): 708-714.
- Smith, Anthony. *Nationalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001.
- Wilce, James. "Communicating Multiple Identities in Muslim Communities: An Introduction." *Ethos* no. 26 (1998): 115-119.



JHS

55

History  
Studies

Volume 8  
Issue 3  
September  
2016