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RETHINKING NATIONALISM IN SELECTED WORKS OF THE SO CALLED NATIONAL POET MEHMET AKİF ERSOY

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ABSTRACT

Reflecting the socio-cultural realities of last years of Ottoman Sultanate and the foundation of Turkish Republic in his works, Mehmet Akif Ersoy is known as “the national poet” of Turkey and is among one of the prominent figures of man of letters in Turkey. Despite his irreplaceable position in literature, few is known about him on international academic fields. Testifying the corruption in society in early twentieth century, he struggles to keep the consciousness of his citizens alive against both, the enemies inside and outside by referring to Islamic unity and eliminating ignorance in society. Upon reading his life and his works, it appears that, called as a “national or nationalist” poet, his nationalism is a little bit different from the wide scale definitions of nationalism. Basically it can be proposed that there are three different approaches of nationalism; the first one is primordialism whose main focus is on ethnicity; the second one is modernism which argues that nation and nationalism are the subject matter of the last two centuries, namely they are modern concepts; and the third one is ethno-symbolism which refuses the modernity of nations and claims that the myths, symbols and morals dating back influence the context of nationalism today. So if he was a nationalist, what kind of a nationalist was Mehmet Akif? Was his main concern on ethnicity, modernity or some values dating back? The aim of this study is discussing his nationalism in his selected works, and attempting to contextualize his position among the various definitions of nation and nationalism, which mostly promote common kinship, territory, heritage and culture.



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STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Reflecting the socio-cultural realities of last years of Ottoman Sultanate and the foundation of Turkish Republic in his works, Mehmet Akif Ersoy is known as “the national poet” of Turkey and is among one of the prominent figures of man of letters in Turkey. Despite his irreplaceable position in literature, few is known about him on international academic fields. Testifying the corruption in society in early twentieth century, he struggles to keep the consciousness of his citizens alive against both, the enemies inside and outside by referring to Islamic unity and eliminating ignorance in society. Upon reading his life and his works, it appears that, called as a “national or nationalist” poet, his nationalism is a little bit different from the wide scale definitions of nationalism. Basically it can be proposed that there are three different approaches of nationalism; the first one is primordialism whose main focus is on ethnicity; the second one is modernism which argues that nation and nationalism are the subject matter of the last two centuries, namely they are modern concepts; and the third one is ethno-symbolism which refuses the modernity of nations and claims that the myths, symbols and morals dating back influence the context of nationalism today. So if he was a nationalist, what kind of a nationalist was Mehmet Akif? Was his main concern on ethnicity, modernity or some values dating back? More importantly, taking into account the historical, cultural, social and political background of Ottoman Sultanate and Turkish Republic, to what extent it might be proper to evaluate Akif’s attempts and works among so many different approaches from different countries? Searching the answer of these questions, it is not possible to give all different approaches in the definition of nationalism within the scope of this study. That’s why the focus will be on some basic definitions and their possible relationship with the nationalism of Akif. The aim of this study is discussing his nationalism in his selected works, and attempting to contextualize his position among the various definitions of nation and nationalism, which mostly promote common kinship, territory, heritage and culture.

As a political doctrine, nationalism has played one of the most prominent roles in shaping the face of the modern world since millions of people around the world have died for their “nation” and it still continues. Certainly, such kind of effective doctrine in the world has an important place in history and literature today due to the fact that history and literature are intermingled. In other words, any event that influences the people of a country will inevitably be recorded as historical document and be a subject matter of the literature of that country. As nationalism is so influential in the world history, each country has its own national man of letters. Mehmet Akif Ersoy is one of the so-called “national” men of letter in Turkey whose selected works are still appreciated by Turkish people as if they were written today. Mehmet Akif worked as an educator and preacher in the National Struggle (1919–1922) toward the foundation of a new Turkish state. To expand national awareness during Balkan Wars and War of Independence, he preached various sermons (Karabacak, M., 2014: p. 569-85). He is famous for being the poet of independence march that was adopted as the Turkish national anthem on March 12, 1921, and for his seven-volume *Safahat* (Phases, 1911–1933) which was an inveigh against the social problems of the day as well as a prolific work

in terms of its polished prosody and style. As will be seen from his biography and works, he worships his life to the unity of the people, independence of his country and the foundation of Republic of Turkey. However, his main concern is neither gathering the members of any ethnicity around him nor lifting the spirit of the citizens with his speech emphasizing on common traditional values and symbols. He always uses the unifying side of Islam with the concept of nation. Those who have the same religious belief are his payer. When we the matter is evaluated in terms of nationalism, the relationship between religions and nationalism seems to have a metamorphosis through time. Before modern age, the religion was over national identity. The dominance of religion was the case for “Western as well as Eastern Christianity, in Islam and in India” (Kohn, 2005: p. 14-15). However, the rise of nationalism changed the course of events and nationalism turned into the dominating force over religion in especially Western societies. Benefitting from religion as a tool, nationalism gradually replaced it and religious identity gave its place to nationalist identity (Greenfeld, 2006: p, 94-95). As a result nationalism turned into “modern religion” of the age (Gündoğdu, 2014: p, 108). The case was not so in Muslim countries. Just like modernism, nationalism was a Western originated doctrine which was used as a tool to both build nation states and also discriminate some states to colonize them. Its damaging results in Ottoman Sultanate proved that, via nationalism, Western countries not only lead different ethnic groups to raise against the state but also benefitting from the chaos, the Sultanate turned into a target to colonize for them. Therefore, nationalism and Islam turned into antipodes and as a Europe-imported doctrine, nationalism was regarded as a cancer to Islamic body (Berkes, p, 374-75). The response to nationalism in Muslim countries was redefining it with reference to Islamic belief. While ethnic nationalists regard their nation superior among others, according to the Islamic belief nobody is superior to the other, nobody is privileged. Being aware of this fact most of the intellectuals including Akif stress on Islamic unity. Ottomanism was regarded as an Islamic identity by Muslims in the Ottoman Sultanate (Karpas, 1964: p. 546) was an alternative to Islamic unity in Muslim countries. An analysis of the views of above scholars clarifies the reality that in the definition(s) of nationalism, the emphasis is never on belief. The elements promoted by these definitions (such as kinship, heritage, territory... etc.) always stay ahead of belief. But Akif’s life and works reveal that one can die for his nation not for the sake of material reasons but for the sake of his belief. The expectation in this case is from hereafter, that’s why Islamic unity is stressed in almost every line of his works. When it comes to call him as “nationalist poet”, as the pioneer intellectual of his time Akif was the defender of the idea that “ethnic nationalism is prohibited in Islam”. So regarding Mehmet Akif as a defender of nationalism won’t be a proper approach (Gökçek, 2006: p, 70). As stated by Hasan Basri Cantay, to Akif, different nations like, Turks, Arabs, Persians and Albanians constituted Muslim society by melting their nationalist feelings in the pot of Muslim unity. Addressing to the third book of *Safahat* in which Akif harshly criticizes ethnic nationalism by underlining his Albanian origin and the calamities in his country, Cantay proposes that calling Akif as a nationalist poet is a kind of insult towards him. Instead, the stress should be on his patriotism (Cantay, 1966: pp, 372-373). Taking into account his life and works, while referring to Akif, it would be

proper to put the stress on his so called “nationalism” aside and memorialize and describe Akif with his devotion and patriotism.

Keywords: Mehmet Akif Ersoy, nationalism, the fight for independence, Islamic unity.

MİLLİ ŞAİR OLARAK BİLİLEN MEHMET AKİF ERSOY’UN SEÇME ESERLERİNDE MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİ YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEK

ÖZ

Osmanlı Devleti’nin son yılları ile Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin kuruluş döneminin sosyo-kültürel gerçeklerinin yansıtan ve “milli şair” olarak bilinen Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Türkiye’nin edebiyat alanında en önde gelen isimlerinden biridir. Edebiyattaki eşsiz konumuna rağmen, uluslararası akademik camiada hakkında bilinenler yetersizdir. 20. yüzyılın ilk yıllarında toplumdaki yozlaşmaya şahit olan Akif, vatandaşların bilincini dahili ve harici düşmanlara karşı uyanık tutma mücadelesi verirken İttihad-ı İslama ve toplumdaki cehaleti ortadan kaldırmaya dikkat çeker. Hayatı ve eserleri incelendiğinde, “milli ya da milliyetçi” olarak bilinen şairin, milliyetçilik anlayışının, geniş yelpazeli milliyetçilik tanımlarından biraz farklı olduğu görülmektedir. Temelde milliyetçilik için üç farklı yaklaşımdan söz edilebilir; birincisi etnik kökeni temel alan primordializm; ikincisi milliyet ve milliyetçilik kavramlarının son iki yüz yılda ortaya çıkmış olduğunu ileri süren modernist görüş; üçüncüsü ise ulusların modernliğini reddeden ve geçmişe yönelik efsanelerin, sembollerin ve törelerin günümüz uluslarını derinden etkilediğini öne süren etnik sembolizmdir. Tüm bunlar göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, “milli şair” olarak Mehmet Akif’in milliyetçiliği hangi kategoride değerlendirilebilir? Asıl üzerinde durduğu nokta etnik kimlik mi, milliyetçiliğin modernliği mi, etnik sembolizm mi? Bu çalışmanın amacı bazı eserlerinden yola çıkarak, Mehmet Akif Ersoy’un milletçiliğini tartışmak ve bu bağlamda şairin, daha çok kan bağı, vatan toprağı, miras ve kültür gibi öğeleri ön planda tutan çeşitli milliyet tanımları arasındaki yerini saptamaya çalışmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mehmet Akif Ersoy, milliyetçilik, bağımsızlık mücadelesi, İttihad-ı İslam

As a political doctrine, nationalism has played one of the most prominent roles in shaping the face of the modern world since millions of people around the world have died for their “nation” and it still continues. Certainly, such kind of effective doctrine in the world has an important place in history and literature today due to the fact that history and literature are intermingled. In other words, any event that influences the people of a country will inevitably be recorded as historical document and be a subject matter of the literature of that country. As nationalism is so influential in the world history, each country has its own national man of letters. Mehmet Akif Ersoy is one of the so-called “national” men of letter in Turkey whose selected works are still appreciated by Turkish people as if they were written today. Mehmet Akif worked as an educator and preacher in the National Struggle (1919–1922) toward the foundation of a new Turkish state. To expand national awareness during Balkan Wars and War of Independence, he preached various sermons (Karabacak, M., 2014: p. 569-85). He is famous

for being the poet of independence march that was adopted as the Turkish national anthem on March 12, 1921, and for his seven-volume *Safahat* (Phases, 1911–1933) which was an inveigh against the social problems of the day as well as a prolific work in terms of its polished prosody and style. He was a gifted linguist in Arabic, Persian, and French so much so that he proposed to love the French romantic Lamartine as much as Turkish Ottoman poet Fuzuli and Alexandre Dumas Fils as much as Persian poet Sadi. Therefore, he considered the “poetic story” style of these great artists as a valid style in his writing. In addition, he enjoyed reading the works of authors such as Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, Emile Zola, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Inspired from this sophisticated and widespread canon, he made his own way in literature. His thoughts, the social conditions he put forward these thoughts and some parts of his works will be evaluated in terms of nationalism later on but first of all it will be proper to mention the concept of nationalism in academic terms to find out what kind of a nationalist is this prolific man of letter.

Despite its efficiency in the world, nationalism was not taken seriously by the social scientists until relatively recently. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was seen as a transition phase. In 1920s and 1930s with the pioneering works of historians like Carleton Hayes, Hans Kohn, Louis Synder and E. H. Carr, nationalism became a subject matter of academic world. Contrary to their predecessors who were interested in only ethical issues, these historians evaluated nationalism as a ‘discrete subject of investigation’. (Smith, 1998: p.17). The experience of decolonization and the proliferation of new states increased the number of the studies on nationalism. The most important decade about nationalism may be regarded as 1980s because the term gained most of its various meanings at this decade by the publication of John Armstrong’s *Nations Before Nationalism* (1982), Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983), Earnest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Eric Hobsbawm and Terrace Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) and Anthony D. Smith’s *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (1986) (Özkırımlı, 2000: p. 2).

There are different assumptions on the time scale and stages of nationalism as well. Those who regard nationalism as a relatively modern doctrine analyze it in three stages: the first stage is the period before the First World War, the second one consists the period from 1918 to 1945, and the third consists the time scale between 1945 to the present (Synder, 1997: p.231). Umut Özkırımlı identifies four stages in the study of nationalism by enhancing the beginning point of nationalism:

1. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the idea of nationalism was born;
2. 1918-45 when nationalism became a subject of inquiry;
3. 1945 to the late 1980s when the debate become more diversified with the participation of sociologists and political scientists;
4. From the late 1980s to the present when attempts to transcend the ‘classical’ debate were made (Özkırımlı, 2000: p.15).

Whatever the starting point of the doctrine might be regarded it is inevitable to think the development of the term “nationalism” without the French Revolution of 1789. It was in fact, within the context of French Revolution that the notion of “nation” was put into practice in legal and political terms. For the revolutionaries of 1789, the nation was the only legitimate source of political power (Baycroft, 1998: p. 5). Therefore, the seeds of the term were planted at 1789, but there are still ongoing arguments about the definition of the term. Gellner gives an absolutely certain answer to the question of whether nationalism had its own ‘grand thinkers’: “we shall not learn too much about nationalism from the study of its own prophets since they all suffered from a pervasive false consciousness” (Gellner, 1983: p. 124-5). Similarly, Anderson argues that “unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own great thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes or

Webers” (1991: p. 5). According to Gellner and Anderson in studying nationalism, we have no reliable resources mostly due to the ambiguous nature of the concept.

In fact, no one can claim clear-cut and certain ideas in social sciences in general. Most of the concepts used today like multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization have various meanings. In understanding these terms, one can meet many versions in the definitions of these concepts. As what the so-called ‘great thinkers’ of these concepts do is, just thinking loudly. The case is the same for nationalism, as well. Since Mehmet Akif Ersoy is defined as ‘national poet’ of Turkey, some different perspectives on the definition of nation and nationalism may be useful in evaluating his works. Of course as in all doctrines, nationalism has several different approaches. In her study *False Opposites in Nationalism* (1999) Margareta Mary Nicolas expresses the broad scope of the term as the following: “Nationalism is an umbrella term covering elements such as national consciousness, the expression of national identity, and loyalty to the nation.” (Nikolas, 1999: p.3). Based on this definition, the kind of nationalism (ethnic or civic), the necessities of nationalism such as collective identity, remaining faithful to nation and demonstrating it when necessary are essential. Besides, there are three different approaches of nationalism as a wide spectrum; the first one is primordialism, which primarily focuses on ethnicity. The second one is modernism, which argues that nation and nationalism are the subject matter of the last two centuries; namely, they are modern concepts. The third one is ethno-symbolism, which refuses the modernity of nations and claims that the myths, symbols and morals dating back influence the context of nationalism today. So if he was a nationalist, what kind of a nationalist was Mehmet Akif? Was his main concern on ethnicity, modernity or some values dating back? More importantly, taking into account the historical, cultural, social and political background of Ottoman Sultanate and Turkish Republic, to what extent it might be proper to evaluate Akif’s attempts and works among so many different approaches from different countries? Searching the answer of these questions, it is not possible to give all different approaches in the definition of nationalism within the scope of this study. That’s why the focus will be on some basic definitions and their possible relationship with the nationalism of Akif.

As a distinguished professor and sociologist, Edward Shils asserts that the reason of the strength of the attachments one feels for his/her family members is not interaction, but “a certain ineffable significance...attributed to the tie of blood” (Shils, 1957: p.142). It can be inferred from Shill’s definition that the main reason of the relationship among people is kin. And this inference inevitably draws attention on ethnicity. Therefore, according to Shils, no matter how many common values you have with the people around you, you can’t have a real relationship as long as you don’t have the “tie of blood”. Anatol Lieven, who is also supposed to be a primordialist as Shills, corroborates him by adding that the division of humanity into different groups with different cultural characteristics is part of the natural order, and these groups will tend to exclude others (Lieven, 1997: p.12). Lieven supports pure ethnicity of a nation and the common values are insignificant for him. Therefore, he proposes that the only necessity of being a nation is having the same ethnic ties. This point of view gives privilege to the members of a certain ethnicity and it gives the right to exclude those who are the members of different ethnicities. Defining the term nation, Don Luigi Sturzo stresses on the factors of “territory, blood, language, culture or history” shared by certain group of people (Sturzo, 1946: p. 25). When it comes to modernist nationalistic approaches, a reaction to primordialism reveals. Ernest Gellner who is also regarded as a modernist absolutely rejects ethnicity in nationalism doctrine:

Nations as a natural, God given way of classifying man, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality, and in general an inescapable one. (Gellner, 1983: p. 48-9)

Gellner elucidates that it is nationalism, which sometimes changes the present culture, sometimes vanishes it and makes nations. He also puts forward that it is the idea of nationalism that brings people together to find nations. Benedict Anderson's definition of nation opens an absolutely new discussion among scholars and historians because he defines nation as an "imagined political community" (Anderson, 1991: p. 6). Anderson regards nations imagined implying the reality that it is impossible for even citizens of the smallest nation to know all their fellow members, or be aware of their presence, still each has the image of their community in mind. The other reason for claiming the nations as "imagined" for Anderson is the finite boundaries surrounding the nations, which refers to their limitedness and also the presence of other nations beyond it. Finally, it is imagined as a community because, "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship". Anderson claims that it is ultimately this sense of fraternity, which makes it possible for so many millions of people to willingly lay down their lives for their nations (pp: 6, 7). Compared with the approaches of his predecessors, Anderson's discourse on nation and nationalism is absolutely different because he proposes that nations are just assumptions, since it is impossible to have a nation as regarded by the citizens. Thus, nations are never present and what makes nationalism so much influential in the world is the assumption of fellowship. On the other hand, some definitions of nationalism refer to its harmful results:

The word nationalism expresses different realities: a love of country, the assertion of national identity and national dignity, but also the xenophobic obsession to obtain these things through violence and sacrificing other nations. Nationalism builds on ethnocentrism towards the in-group and xenophobia towards the out-group. (Llobera, 1999, p. p.7).

Besides possible damaging results of ethnic nationalism, some critics refer to its limitedness as a political doctrine. For instance in *Nationalism and International Relations* (2011) J.B.L. Mayall and J. Jackson-Preece state that as an ideology nationalism reduces itself to just the necessity of owning a state, still it doesn't have the required ideology to form a policy (J.B.L. Mayall, J. Jackson-Preece, 2011: p.39). Taking into account the damaging bloody results of nationalism, it can be proposed that besides providing independent states to many nations, nationalism has turned into a dread as well. The ethocentric nature of nationalism is unfortunately intermixed with patriotism which should be an integral part of each citizen. Anyway, as stated above, due to its extended and renewed structure, it is impossible to analyze all definitions and different views on nation and nationalism in their entirety. As the number of independence experiences increases, there occurs different kind of nations and relatively different definitions of nationalism. That's why some scholars keen on preferring nationalisms instead of nationalism (<https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/What-Is-Nationalism-A-Short-Guide>,05.02.2016). If we take into account the number of the nations in the world, "no individual, no country, no people, no history of a people, no state is like any other. Therefore, the true, the beautiful, and the good are not the same for them" (Kohn, 2005: p. 433). The case should be so for the definition of nationalism(s) as well. In other words, based on its religious, cultural, traditional and social norms, each nation uniquely redefines the concept of nationalism.

In the light of the views above the so-called "national" poet Mehmet Akif and some of his works will be evaluated. Based on new historicist critical approach, the best way of understanding the work of any author is taking the conditions of the time he is living in into account. Mehmet Akif lived in a road junction of the collapse of Ottoman Sultanate and the foundation of Turkish Republic. He was educated in the educational system of Abdulhamid II, which was designed to equip the students with both classical and western culture (Karakoç, 1987: p. 12). Born in İstanbul, Fatih, as the child of a Rumelian Father and an Uzbek mother Akif was described as "a synthesis of East, West and Central Islamism" (Karakoç, 1987: p. 7). 1908 Revolution was a turning point for Ottoman Sultanate and Mehmet Akif as well. The ambivalence of Ottoman Sultanate between Eastern and Western

civilizations caused a crisis in the state. Three distinct movements of thought emerged among the intellectuals; the first one was reformist generation who regarded Westernization as the only way, the second one was Turkists who believed in the superiority of the Turks and regarded the Turks as the single choice for salvation. The third one was Islamists who defended the idea that the devotion to Islam will be the remedy to the catastrophe the country was in. Akif was among Islamists and founded *Sırat-ı Müstakim* (the former name of *Sebilürreşad*) together with Eşref Edip (Karakoç, 1987: p. 20). More than a state policy, the idea of Islamists was that; the cease in the society stems from the degeneration of the Muslims and the salvation will be possible only by returning to the origin of Islam. This does not mean rejecting the advancement. As will be seen subsequently, Islamists are open to improvement and encourage the people to catch up with the necessities of the time. What they criticize is the kind of westernization with mere superficial imitation that is lack of advancement. The attitude of Akif towards civilization and westernization is clear from the narrations of one of his closest friends, Mithat Cemal Kuntay. Kuntay narrates that Akif was a strict defender of advancement and modernization; however, he was against mere imitation. That's why he was fond of Japanese who adopted western civilization by making no concessions to their belief (Kuntay, 2011: p. 265-278). Within these terms, before referring to Akif's attempts of awakening his citizens via his sermons, poems and negotiations it will be proper to review a short panorama of Ottoman Sultanate at the time.

The end of 19th century and the first two decades of 20th century was a disaster literally to the citizens of Ottoman Sultanate. On the one hand the lost of extended territory, on the other hand the awaiting colonial powers waiting to share the remaining lands led the disappointment in the state. The weakness of Ottoman Sultanate coinciding with the rise of nationalism caused the Ottoman Christians to build their own nationalisms (Somel, 2003: p. 211). As a result, Ottoman Sultanate disintegrated. The rise against Ottoman centre started by non-Muslim Ottoman Balkans; the separation of Serbia in 1804 was followed by that of Greece in 1821. Taking the advantage of nationalistic feelings Russia was provoking the Orthodox communities in the state, which caused loss of territory for Ottoman Sultanate (Pfaff, 1993: p. 97). By the way, the citizens were suffering from harsh poverty due to the state's economic downturn. From all stated reasons, the feeling of disappointment was dominant in the state. In 1918, War of Independence was over and Ottoman Sultanate was compelled to hard armistice conditions by incurring great lose. In 1920, Ottoman Sultanate signed the Treaty of Sevres according to which nearly all the land of the Ottoman Sultanate was divided within allied powers.

Beginning from the Balkan Wars, the cruelty experienced by Balkan Muslims and the disastrous results of ethnic nationalism, Akif tries to raise awareness among his citizens by his sermons and poems. Since he was aware of the fact that especially in the cases of catastrophe, the society was in need of motivation that could be provided by literature. During the First World War, he regarded it as a national responsibility to visit captured Muslim soldiers among the soldiers of Entente Estates in Berlin as well as the Western front to motivate the hopeless soldiers (Ulucutsoy, 2018: pp. 200-234). As Albania was the fatherland of Akif, the dissolution of the state due to the influence of ethnic nationalism in Balkans offends Akif heavily. The atrocity against the Muslims in Balkan Wars was renounced to the public and the fact that just like in Crusades the war was between Christians and Muslims was affirmed in *Sebilürreşad* in which Akif was the editor in chief (Polat, 2011: p. 114). Since, with the loss of Balkan War, the remaining Muslims were compelled by the Bulgarians to convert to Orthodoxy. In his sermons in İstanbul, Akif's aim was to awaken his people towards the forthcoming disaster, which might cause the loss of Caliphate as the leader of the Muslims all over the world. The loss of Ottoman would mean the loss of the castle of Islam. Therefore, it's time to recover and struggle for the safety of Muslims (Ersoy, 2011: pp. 397-407). The official invasion of İstanbul by Allied powers was the final straw that led the intellectuals of the time including Mehmet Akif to take part in National Struggle. Mehmet Akif Ersoy severely argued against the Treaty of Sevres and gave sermons in the various cities in order to raise the national conscious of the people who were hopeless because of both, exhausting from the war that they were beaten and financial difficulties the country

was in. He was struggling to explain the reason of the disaster and its possible solutions referring religious sources and retrospective myths to promote patriotic feelings among citizens. Since, he intended to awaken his citizens against the forthcoming danger, which might result in not only the loss of soil but also the loss of religion. Akif was conscious of the fact that the disintegration of Anatolia was due to the attempts of occupying forces and National Struggle was the last opportunity for Muslims to survive (Karan, 2011: p. 31). Regarding ethnic nationalism as a potential danger that causes the disintegration of the state, Akif struggles to warn his citizens against it.

The sermon that he gave in 1920 in Kastamonu had a great influence in terms of unifying the hopeless people of the beaten Sultanate. He started with some verses from Quran to imply the significance of Muslim Unity and then went on with the crucial cases of the time and possible solutions. The core points of this sermon were the condition that Ottoman Sultanate was in and Treaty of Sevres. Proposing that accepting Treaty of Sevres meant the end of the state he invited everybody to take their guns and fight faithfully for the freedom of the state against the colonialist powers (Sebilürreşad, 1920: p, 255). He also touched on the fact that Ottoman Sultanate was in peace because Islam welcomed any differences but the advent of nationalism separated the state. He added poems into his speech and lifted the spirits of the people by the way he described the case (Sebilürreşad, 1919: p, 175). When this speech was published by the journal of Sebilürreşat, it was spread all over the country and was even made into a pamphlet and distributed to Turkish soldiers. As an educator and preacher in the National Struggle (1919–1922) this speech and the next ones contributed greatly to unify the people and encourage them to war for the sake of freedom of the nation. By the way the speed of spread and effect of these speeches reveals the effect of oral literature. That is what Ngugi Wa Thiong’O calls as “orature” in the fourth chapter of his *Globalectics* and defines importance of literal speech by Micero Mugo’s onion structure theory. According to this theory, interconnectedness of reality is reflected in an aesthetic way by orature. Micero Mugo defines this as “onion structure theory.” This theory is shaped around a circular core at the center, which is surrounded by cumulative layers increasing in their circular shape. The tight relationship among these layers responsively constitutes the whole. Ngugi appreciates Mugo’s definition of orature and adds “orature reflects a reality of connected circles from the inner being of the individual and social person to the outmost circle of “the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky and the rest of the elements” (WaThiong’O, 2012: p, 75). Mehmet Akif sincerely feels what he says, that’s why his speech influenced the listeners deeply, so much so that, at the end of the speech not only Akif, but also the entire listeners were in tears (Edip, 1938: p, 61). Just like in Mugo’s theory, the influence of Mehmet Akif’s speech “became larger and larger” during the process of Independence war in terms of unifying the soldier and the folk besides keeping the spirit of the national struggle alive. His distinguishable struggles to find solutions to the problems of the suffering citizens caused Akif to be called as “the psychiatrist of the age” because besides his sermons in mosques, he performed his duty even in graveyards, coffeehouses and public houses (Topçu, 2011: p, 16). In this context, Topçu calls Akif as “Emile Zola” of Turkish society as a socialist moralist who deals with the calamities of the age (Topçu, 2011: p, 67). Similarly, Orhan Okay describes him “the only poet who truly integrated with public” (Okay, 2015: p, 32, 38, 39).

Apart from his speeches that had a great influence on the national unity of the people, Mehmet Akif’s most famous work, seven-volume *Safahat* (Phases, 1911–1933) played a crucial role during the social dissolution of Ottoman Sultanate. *Safahat* was written to “reveal the calamity of the society (Okay, 2015: p, 37). Together with the occupying attempts against the state, the influence of westernization put people in a dilemma of preference. Thus, due to the backwardness of the state in terms of technological developments, some were in favor of total westernization while others defended the idea of devotion together with meeting the necessities of the time. In such an atmosphere, the VI.th book of *Safahat* titled as *Asım* derives attention in terms of the national messages it combines. The sociologic, moral and psychological problems of the state are evaluated in *Asım*. In this part, Akif writes about the lives of real people into social novel in verse form, composed throughout in polished

classical prosody and style and displaying a talent for the use of vignette to inveigh against societal ills in *Asım*. In this work, his target audience is the bright and patriot Turkish youth. He starts with this part by describing the disastrous and seemingly hopeless case in the country (Ersoy, 1986: p, 379). The moral corruptions in the society besides the dissolution of the state are the subject matters of the poet as well (Ersoy, 1986: p, 384). According to the poet, in such a desperate case, when all the enemies collaborate and attack the Ottomans, which seems the conflict between Muslims and Christians, the descent of Asım, the patriot youth won't let anybody to extend the limits of his country and it is this generation who will rescue his nation and establish the Turkish Republic in the future (Ersoy, 1986: p, 21-470). There are four main characters in *Asım*: Hocasade, Hocasade's son Emin, beardless Imam and Imam's son Asım. There are three generations in *Asım*; the first one is those who grew up in the time of II. Abdulhamid, educated at madrasah, appreciated the style of madrasah, and represented by Beardless Imam, the second one is those who educated at school; disapprove of Abdulhamid administration and in favour of Committee of Union and Progress and the generation of Hocasade. Mehmet Akif implies that both of these generations have some mistakes, which will be corrected by the third generation, the generation of Asım. The descend of Asım is both devout to Islam and equipped with the necessities of the time. The backwardness of the state in terms of technological advance, which caused the defeat and disaster in the state, will be eliminated with the descent of Asım (Ersoy, 1986: p. 130-187-443). However, this doesn't mean a simple imitation of the Western culture and regarding it as advancement. Such kind of mere imitation is considered as a kind of betrayal to patriotism of the descent of Asım (Ersoy, 1986: p, 172). The strict adherence to religion and country are essential for the descent of Asım. Actually, Mehmet Akif correlates his ideas about social issues, politic, morality, identity, patriot, religion, consciousness of history, science... etc. with Asım. Asım and his generation are the ideal citizens and they will change the fate of the country by their faith and determination. Through fiction, Akif attempts to analyze the status quo of his country by sharp criticism. Still he does not lose his hope in the misery and intends to keep the spirit of the nation alive by the ideal character Asım. To him the ignorance of the society will be eliminated by the generation of Asım, since this generation will be educated according to the necessities of the time but never lose their Muslim spirit. The two critical elements presented as the solution to the pessimist citizens of the nation are eliminating ignorance and unifying by Islamic rituals (Safi, 2017: p, 334). *Asım* was regarded as a unique work in terms of unifying religious and national wills. In *Mehmet Akif Nurettin Topçu* proposes that Akif's *Asım* succeeded in saving the spirit of the age by unifying nationalism with Islam (Topçu, 2011: p, 46). Since, redefining nationalism by eliminating ethnicity and underlining the tight connection between Islam and patriotism, Akif achieved developing a new synthesis. It should be stressed that, unfortunately, *Safahat* couldn't get the achievement Akif had in his sermons in. Süleyman Nazif narrates that *Asım* didn't make an overwhelming influence among the society at the time but adds that as the "Miracle Poet" the next generations will insistently deal with it (Nazif, 2015: p, 90). The wide range of studies on *Asım* and other literary works of Akif at the present time justify Nazif's prediction.

Another prolific work of Mehmet Akif Ersoy is his independence march that was adopted as the Turkish national anthem. That is the independence march entitles him as a "national poet" but as it is seen from his other works he advocates his whole life to the unity and freedom of his nation throughout his life. The time that the Independence March written values mentioning because after Mehmet Akif's march announced to be the national march of Turkey and when he was asked how he had written it, he would reply that such kind of a march could only be written at that time. While Grand National Assembly of Turkey was in preparation of foundation of Republic, a march that would be the symbol of freedom needed. It would be a march that would "protect the national excitement, keep national determination and faith alive, similar to the French march Marsailles" (Nalbantoğlu, 1963: pp, 55-6). Akif firstly didn't accept the idea of writing a march and take part in the competition to get the monetary reward. However, because of the insistences of especially the Ministry of Education, he regarded it as a duty to "inspire and excite" (Erişirgil, 1956: p. 436-37) his citizens and

decided to write the march. As a result, the competition was held and that of Mehmet Akif was announced to be the national Independence March. The theme of “nation” can be observed clearly in the national Independence March. The most striking point of Independence March is that though it was written for the foundation of Turkish Republic, Akif insists on not referring to a specific nation by giving a private name, instead he uses the term as “my nation”. Moreover, he implies that the nation that he mentions belongs to those who believe in God. At the very beginning of Independent March he speaks with Turkish flag asserting his anger with his citizens who were unable to prevent the occupation of the country and he tries to convince it that everybody who has faith in his heart will fight to the last drop of the blood until the last citizen of the country dies:

Fear not! For the red flag that proudly ripples in this glorious twilight, shall never fade,
Before the last fiery hearth that is ablaze within my nation is extinguished.
For that is the star of my nation and it will forever shine;
It is mine; and solely belongs to my valiant nation.
Frown not, I beseech you, oh thou coy crescent,
But smile upon my heroic race! Why the anger, why the rage?
Our blood which we shed for you will not be blessed otherwise;
For freedom is the absolute right of my God-worshipping nation
(The Turkish National Anthem).

He never implicates blood tie or ethnicity; on the contrary, according to him what unites a nation is the common belief. This ideology, focusing on moral values rather than other common ties, finds its best expression in Mehmet Akif’s sermons and poems (Oba et al., 2014: pp, 565-69). The different approach towards nationalism(s) between western countries and Ottoman Sultanate might stem from the fact that the historical process in which nationalism emerges in both sides is starkly different. To William W. Haddad, in Western countries, nation states raised the terms “nation” and “nationalism” while in Eastern countries nationalism was described before nation states were founded (Haddad, 1977: p,10). While the focus is on the land of a specific ethnic group in West, regardless of their ethnicity, the land is owned by the believers in East. Those who read Independent March will see that the term nation was defined as; “God-worshipping, eternal homeland”, and the march is written for those who are “noble son of a martyr”, who can give up everything for the sake of never abandoning their country:

You're the noble son of a martyr, take shame, hurt not your ancestor!
Unhand not, even when you're promised worlds, this paradise of a homeland.
What man would not die for this heavenly piece of land?
Martyrs would gush out were one to just squeeze the soil! Martyrs!
May God take all my loved ones and possessions from me if He will,
But may He not deprive me of my one true homeland for the world
(The Turkish National Anthem).

He often stresses the importance of his land and how important it is for him but actually the reason of importance of the land is not because it is value as a piece of land but because the feeling of fidelity and respect towards those martyrs who died on that land for the sake of Islamic belief. According to the laws of Islam, those fighting for defending Islam when there is any attack and dying

will be martyrs and directly go to paradise in Judgement Day. It is not ethnicity, kinship or land that make so many people go to death without blinking an eye. What Akif tries to do is just reminding those sincere ancestors and unifying the youth who are hopeless because of the situation the country is in. As it is seen from his biography and works, he worships his life to the unity of the people, independence of his country and the foundation of Republic of Turkey. However, his main concern is neither gathering the members of any ethnicity around him nor lifting the spirit of the citizens with his speech emphasizing on common traditional values and symbols. He always uses the unifying side of Islam with the concept of nation. Those who have the same religious belief are his payer. The relationship between religions and nationalism seems to have a metamorphosis through time. Before modern age, the religion was over national identity. The dominance of religion was the case for “Western as well as Eastern Christianity, in Islam and in India” (Kohn, 2005: p, 14-15). However, the rise of nationalism changed the course of events and nationalism turned into the dominating force over religion in especially Western societies. Benefitting from religion as a tool, nationalism gradually replaced it and religious identity gave its place to nationalist identity (Greenfeld, 2006: p, 94-95). As a result nationalism turned into “modern religion” of the age (Gündoğdu, 2014: p, 108). The case was not so in Muslim countries. Just like modernism, nationalism was a Western originated doctrine which was used as a tool to both build nation states and also discriminate some states to colonize them. Its damaging results in Ottoman Sultanate proved that, via nationalism, Western countries not only lead different ethnic groups to raise against the state but also benefitting from the chaos, the Sultanate turned into a target to colonize for them. Therefore, nationalism and Islam turned into antipodes and as a Europe-imported doctrine, nationalism was regarded as a cancer to Islamic body (Berkes, p, 374-75). The response to nationalism in Muslim countries was redefining it with reference to Islamic belief. While ethnic nationalists regard their nation superior among others, according to the Islamic belief nobody is superior to the other, nobody is privileged. Being aware of this fact most of the intellectuals including Akif stress on Islamic unity. Ottomanism regarded as an Islamic identity by Muslims in the Ottoman Sultanate (Karpat, 1964: p, 546) was an alternative to Islamic unity in Muslim countries. An analysis of the views of above scholars clarifies the reality that in the definition(s) of nationalism the emphasis is never on belief. The elements promoted by these definitions (such as kinship, heritage, territory... etc.) always stay ahead of belief. But Akif’s life and works reveal that one can die for his nation not for the sake of material reasons but for the sake of his belief. The expectation in this case is from hereafter, that’s why Islamic unity is stressed in almost every line of his works. When it comes to call him as “nationalist poet”, as the pioneer intellectual of his time Akif was the defender of the idea that “ethnic nationalism is prohibited in Islam”. So regarding Mehmet Akif as a defender of nationalism won’t be proper approach (Gökçek, 2006: p, 70). As stated by Hasan Basri Cantay, to Akif, different nations like, Turks, Arabs, Persians and Albanians constituted Muslim society by melting their nationalist feelings in the pot of Muslim unity. Addressing to the third book of *Safahat* in which Akif harshly criticizes ethnic nationalism by underlining his Albanian origin and the calamities in his country, Cantay proposes that calling Akif as a nationalist poet is a kind of insult towards him. Instead, the stress should be on his patriotism (Cantay, 1966: p, 372-373). Taking into account his life and works, while referring to Akif, it would be proper to put the stress on his so called “nationalism” aside and memorialize and describe Akif with his devotion and patriotism.

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