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PATTERNS OF NATIONHOOD AND SAVING THE STATE IN TURKEY

**OTTOMANISM, NATIONALISM
AND MULTICULTURALISM**

Serhun Al



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Patterns of Nationhood and Saving the State in Turkey

Patterns of Nationhood and Saving the State in Turkey tackles a theoretical puzzle in understanding the state policy changes toward minorities and nationhood, first by placing the state in the historical context of the international system and second by unpacking the state through analysis of intra-elite competition in relation to the counter-discourses by minority groups within the context of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey.

What explains the persistence and change in state policies toward minorities and nationhood? Under what conditions do states change their policies toward minorities? Why do the state elites reconsider the state-minority relations and change government policies toward nationhood? Adopting a comparative-historical analysis, the book unpacks these research questions and builds a theoretical framework by looking at three paradigmatic policy changes: Ottomanism in the mid-19th century, Turkish nationalism in the early 1920s, and multiculturalism in Turkey in the early 2000s. While the book reveals the role of international context, intrastate elite competition, and non-state actors in such policy changes, it argues that state elites adopt either exclusionary or inclusionary policies based on the idea of “survival of the state.”

The book is primarily an important contribution to studies in ethnicity and nationalism. It is also an essential resource for students and scholars interested in Comparative Politics, Middle East Studies, the Ottoman Empire, and Turkey.

Serhun Al is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Izmir University of Economics, Turkey. His main research interests include the politics of identity, ethnic conflict, and security studies within the context of Turkish and Kurdish politics. He is the coeditor of a recent book entitled *Comparative Kurdish Politics in the Middle East: Actors, Ideas, and Interests* (Palgrave, 2018).

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Patterns of Nationhood and Saving the State in Turkey

Ottomanism, Nationalism and
Multiculturalism

Serhun Al

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This book began as a dissertation at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, where I started the doctoral program in political science back in 2009. It took around six years to build the intellectual and historical background, theoretical framework, and empirical data to finally complete the dissertation in 2015. Then I moved back to my hometown, Izmir, and joined the Department of Political Science and International Relations (IR) at Izmir University of Economics in 2016, where I tediously worked on turning the dissertation into this book. I am grateful to everyone who was involved in this long period of my life, during which I've become a curious social and political scientist who's never tired of asking research questions and a motivated teacher who enjoys sharing his academic and life experiences with his students.

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Serhun Al Izmir,
August 2018

List of abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party (<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>)
ANAP	Motherland Party (<i>Anavatan Partisi</i>)
CHP	Republican People's Party (<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i>)
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress (<i>İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti</i>)
DDKO	Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (<i>Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları</i>)
DEP	Democracy Party (<i>Demokrasi Partisi</i>)
DP	Democrat Party (<i>Demokrat Parti</i>)
DYP	True Path Party (<i>Doğru Yol Partisi</i>)
EU	European Union
HEP	People's Labor Party (<i>Halkın Emek Partisi</i>)
MHP	Nationalist Action Party (<i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i>)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (<i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan</i>)
RP	Welfare Party (<i>Refah Partisi</i>)
RPP	Republican People's Party (<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i>)
TBMM	Grand National Assembly of Turkey (<i>Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi</i>)
TİP	Workers Party of Turkey (<i>Türkiye İşçi Partisi</i>)
TRT	Turkish Radio and Television (<i>Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu</i>)
TSK	Turkish Armed Forces (<i>Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri</i>)
UN	United Nations



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Introduction

Research puzzle and the argument

Under what conditions and why do the state elites change their policies toward nationhood? With the Official Languages Act of 1969, Canada shifted to two official languages after the concerns over the French-speaking Québécois and uses an ethnic classification in its population census to reflect the cultural diversity of the nation.¹ The United States has no official language, but started to exercise affirmative action in the 1960s in order to overcome the historical discrimination toward those groups who were excluded from American national identity. The United States also embraces an ethnically/racially classified population census system.² France has only one official language and there is no classification of ethnicity in the census and there is no affirmative action based on ethnicity or race.³ France also bans religious symbols, such as veils, in public schools.⁴ Sri Lanka, with Sinhala-speaking majority (74%) and Tamil-speaking minority, shifted to two official languages in the 1980s.⁵ The Australian state officially began to define the nation as multicultural in the 1970s.⁶ After centuries of a hierarchical and confessional-based autonomy system, the Ottoman Empire first introduced the overarching Ottoman nationhood beyond ethnic and religious affiliations in the

1 Eve Haque, *Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework: Language, Race, and Belonging in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

2 John D. Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

3 David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, eds., *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

4 Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

5 Sujit Choudhry, "Constitutional Politics and Crisis in Sri Lanka," in *Multination States in Asia: Accommodation or Resistance*, eds. Jacques Bertrand and Andre Laliberte (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 103–135.

6 Jatinder Mann, *The Search for a New National Identity: The Rise of Multiculturalism in Canada and Australia, 1890s–1970s* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016).

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nineteenth century.⁷ In the 2000s, after decades of ethnic-based imagined “German-ness,” the German state has begun to grant citizenship to the children of Turkish worker migrants, the largest non-German community in Germany.⁸ Turkey, historically an assimilationist state, has also begun promoting minority languages, particularly Kurdish, through state-funded television channels in the early 2000s.⁹

These policies represent a diversity of nation-building and nationhood policies that states adopt, internalize, and reconsider over time in which the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are set. While some of these policies were embraced in the beginning of the social engineering projects of state- and nation-building, many others were adopted gradually in the historical evolutions of nations. In other words, despite being persistent, nation-building and nationhood policies are rarely conclusive but rather they are subject to change over time. Thus, while some states largely remained loyal to their historical nation-building projects and the boundaries of nationhood, many others moved away from them and changed their path-dependent policies, especially with regard to the historical position of minority groups. Why do some states change their nationhood policies that reconsider and reorganize their ethnic and religious social world, while others show resistance to such changes? In general, the puzzle is about the policy change in the institutional design of the state and its nation-building *raison d’être* over time.

This book seeks to offer a theoretical framework in order to explain the policy changes from a comparative-historical perspective, with specific attention to the cases of the late Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey. *Under what conditions and why do states change their policies toward nationhood and minorities? What is the underlying motivation of state elites in such policy changes?* These questions not only aim to explain why and with what motivation the policy change occurs—they also consider the issue of the approximate timing of the change.

States attempt to make societies “legible” and simplified through social engineering tools, such as an official language, in order to consolidate their routine functions, such as taxation and the prevention of rebellion.¹⁰ The idea of a modern nation congruent with its state has been part of the simplification processes in which a homogenous cultural community has been the ultimate goal. Yet the idea of a homogenous nation with a monolithic national identity has remained an ideal type in most cases within which assimilation has been the social engineering tool of the state. While some

7 Will Hanley, “What Ottoman Nationality Was and Was Not,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2016), pp. 277–298.

8 Şener Aktürk, *Regimes of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia, and Turkey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

9 Ibid.

10 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

states have been successful in building relatively homogenous nations with a motivation for an unrivaled ethnicity and nationhood, others have encountered alternative identity claims both from within where the peripheral ethnic groups have become politicized and from outside as new immigrants have challenged the institutionalized national identities. Moreover, some other states have practiced the options of accommodation or exclusion rather than assimilation. In cases where assimilation policies have failed, the nation-state as an ideal project has found itself in an identity crisis. At that point, the option of cultural pluralism in the public sphere for political contestation has come to the front. The politics of cultural pluralism,¹¹ multiculturalism,¹² and the politics of difference¹³ have become the new policy options for the states, especially in liberal democratic ones. These debates question the state as a culturally neutral entity in general and the assimilative state policies toward minorities in particular. If states take these arguments into consideration and political reform occurs, the puzzle, then, is to explain under what conditions the path-dependent policies of the founding nation-building motivations and the boundaries of nationhood encounter critical junctures. Thus, the question here is not just about why the change occurs, but it is also about when the change occurs since path dependency and critical junctures are important in comparative-historical research.

I choose three cases of paradigmatic shifts in state policies toward nationhood from the late Ottoman imperial context until contemporary Turkey. These cases can shed light on the contemporary identity issues that many post-Ottoman states encounter in the Middle East in general and Turkey in particular:

- 1 In terms of the in-depth analysis, the first case of the book deals with the shift from the Ottoman millet system to the official state policy of Ottomanism in the mid-nineteenth century, which promoted patriotic Ottoman nationhood across Muslim and non-Muslim ethnic and religious lines. This initiative resulted with the Ottoman Nationality Law of 1869. What kind of factors led the Ottoman political elites in embracing such a paradigmatic change after the centuries-long path dependency in the traditional millet system? What was their logic and motivation in such change?
- 2 The second case analyzes the paradigmatic change from supranational Ottoman identity to assimilation-based national Turkish identity in the 1920s, within which the origins of contemporary Turkey's Kurdish

11 Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

12 Charles Taylor and Amy Gutmann, eds., *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

13 Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

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minority challenge were seeded. Despite the fall of the Ottoman Empire after the World War I, sticking to the Ottoman identity of the state was still an option but the political elites chose not to. Why? What led them to embrace a new national identity?

- 3 The third case is the Turkish state's initiative, beginning in early 2000s, to promote minority languages through official television channels and elective courses in public schools, particularly with regard to the Kurdish citizens, which is a paradigmatic shift in a historically assimilative state. How did the decades-long path dependency of strict assimilation come to a critical juncture? Why did not the state elites reconsider and change their minority policy before the 2000s?

The issue of approximate timing is essential here. Why did the Turkish state start broadcasting in minority languages during the 2000s rather than in the 1980s or 1990s? Or why did the state elites adopt Turkishness not in the late nineteenth century but in the 1920s, before the establishment of the Republic? Or why did the Ottoman state adopt Ottomanism in the 1840s and 1850s but not in the late eighteenth century? Overall, I explore these questions through comparative-historical analysis and within a specific analytical framework that provides four ideal-type institutional designs of nationhood (in relation to minorities) that I will elaborate on more in Chapter 2.

By analyzing these three paradigmatic changes in the state-minority relations and the question of nationhood, I argue that there is a common pattern of mechanisms that lead to nationhood and minority policy change which include three particular conditions:

- 1 A favorable international context for change;
- 2 The influence of domestic non-state actors in increasing the leverage for change;
- 3 The anti-status quo elites controlling the state by eliminating the pro-status quo veto players.

I frame these conditions as *external necessities* and *internal opportunities*. As the first two conditions make change a necessity for the state, the third condition creates the opportunity for change. In the absence of the first two conditions, the third condition becomes a null element because the anti-status quo elites build their discourses in relation to the international political and normative context (e.g., assimilationism vs. multiculturalism) on the one hand and the influence of non-state actors on the other.

In terms of the main motivation for change, I argue that state elites adopt either exclusionary or inclusionary policies toward minorities based on the idea of "survival of the state." Based on the nexus of international normative context and domestic political realities, state elites believe that ontological security of the state would be at risk if they don't take any measures toward their nationhood and minorities. If international

context is more favorable to exclusion, they tend to exclude minority identities from the boundaries of nationhood. However, if the international normative context is more favorable to inclusion (e.g., Wilsonian norms, UN norms, EU norms), they tend to orchestrate minority reforms toward inclusion. In any case, the concern of the state elites is primarily the “survival of the state.” They act more pragmatically and strategically rather than being blindfolded nationalists or wholehearted democrats. Then, the conventional dichotomy of security versus liberty should not necessarily be seen mutually exclusive in this context since liberty can also be an instrument of security.

The central arguments of the book rely on a tedious historical analysis of persistence and change in nationhood and minority policies from the early nineteenth century to the early 2000s in the Ottoman/Turkish political context. Sources used include archival documents, official publications in the late Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey, speeches of political elites, journals and newspapers, parliamentary proceedings, and secondary sources.

I choose these cases, differing in time and direction of change, for three specific reasons. First, the reason for choosing the Ottoman Empire is that minority policies are not limited to the modern nation-states. Both in an imperial state and in a nation-state, patterns of change in nationhood policies take place and the causes behind them entail in-depth analysis. The confessional-based Ottoman *millet* system that gave autonomy to the Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and Jews is considered to be non-assimilative and a unique system of managing diversity in a non-Western context.¹⁴ On the other hand, although Turkey’s nation-building project began based on firm assimilation, the state-framed nationhood has been gradually deconstructed. An explanation over the similar *raison d’être* of states’ changing policies toward nationhood and minorities regardless of imperial or nation-state setting is likely to take the research agenda beyond nation-states and their discontents.

Second, the comparison between the late Ottoman Empire and contemporary Turkey is likely to shed light on the two different social worlds of the governing diversity and nationhood. Third, the differences in the historical periods when policy changes take place strengthen the research design in terms of comparative-historical analysis. Although contextual analysis is an emphasis in this research, explaining policy changes similar in nature beyond certain historical contexts and time periods provide insights for understanding the general conditions that make states change their policies toward nationhood.

14 Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).