

DR. RIZA NUR AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE TURKISH
HISTORY THESIS

by

SONA KHACHATRYAN

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**DR. RIZA NUR AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE TURKISH
HISTORY THESIS**

APPROVED BY:

Yusuf Hakan Erdem
(Thesis Advisor)

.....

Halil Berktaş

.....

Hülya Adak

.....

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ABSTRACT

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Sona Khachatryan

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Keywords: nationalism, Dr. Rıza Nur, Turkish history, Turkish History Thesis, early Republican era

This thesis attempts to examine whether Dr. Rıza Nur had any influence on the Turkish History Thesis. Being marginalized, Dr. Rıza Nur is either an unknown figure or he is known for his criticism towards Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This has had several repercussions on Dr. Rıza Nur's image, leading to the neglect of his contributions to Turkish history, his influences as a Turkist, and, in particular, the lack of interest in producing scholarly works about him. In order to manifest whether Dr. Rıza Nur influenced the Turkish History Thesis, Dr. Rıza Nur's *Turkish History*, published over the period between 1924 and 1926, has been studied and compared with the Turkish History Thesis, which was launched by the Kemalist regime at the beginning of the 1930s. By comparing the two historical narratives, which depict the Turkish national historiography of the early Republican era, a significant number of similarities are observed that demonstrate the high possibility of Dr. Rıza Nur's influence. Additionally, the comparison reveals a number of divergent aspects between the two historical narratives, which sets Dr. Rıza Nur apart from the authors of the Turkish History Thesis.

ÖZET

DR. RIZA NUR VE ONUN TÜRK TARİH TEZİ İLE İLİŞKİSİ

Sona Khachatryan

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Anahtar Kelimeler: milliyetçilik, Dr. Rıza Nur, Türk tarihi, Türk Tarih Tezi, erken Cumhuriyet dönemi

Bu tez Dr. Rıza Nur'un Türk Tarih Tezi'ne herhangi bir etkisi olup olmadığını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Dr. Rıza Nur ya hiç bilinmeyen ya da sadece Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'e yaptığı eleştirilerle bilinen marjinalleştirilmiş bir kişiliktir. Bu durum Dr. Rıza Nur'un imajını çeşitli şekillerde etkilemiştir. Türk tarihine olan katkıları ve bir Türkçü olarak çalışmaları görmezden gelinerek, Dr. Rıza Nur hakkında akademik eserler yazılması konusunda isteksizlik oluşmasına sebep olmuştur. Dr. Rıza Nur'un Türk Tarih Tezi'ni etkileyip etkilemediğini göstermek için bu tezde Dr. Rıza Nur'un 1924-1926 yılları arasında yayınlanmış *Türk Tarihi* incelenmiş ve Kemalist rejim tarafından 1930'ların başında ortaya çıkarılmış Türk Tarih Tezi ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Erken Cumhuriyet döneminin Türk milli tarihçiliğini yansıtan bu iki tarihsel anlatı karşılaştırıldığında, ikisi arasında kayda değer benzerlikler olduğu gözlemlenmiş ve Dr. Rıza Nur'un büyük ihtimalle Türk Tarih Tezi'ne etkileri olduğu gösterilmiştir. Ayrıca, bu karşılaştırma bahsi geçen iki tarihsel anlatının farklılık arzeden bazı yönlerini de göstermekte ve bu şekilde Dr. Rıza Nur'u Türk Tarih Tezi'nin yazarlarından ayrı bir konuma yerleştirmektedir.

To my mother, Narine Mheryan

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to examine Dr. Rıza Nur's relationship to the Turkish History Thesis by comparing *Türk Tarihi* (Turkish History), written by Rıza Nur, and the Turkish History Thesis. Both of these national historical narratives are the products of the same era when nationalism was making its headway in Turkish society. The late 19th and early 20th century, which is the transition period from the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, is considered to be a crucial period in the formation of Turkish nationalism. The inspiration from European nationalist movements in the 19th century, the influence of the writings of European Orientalists, and the influence of Turkic origin émigrés from Russia were among the factors that contributed to the rise of Turkish nationalism.¹ During the Young Turk era, Turkism gradually came to the fore. The Balkan wars of 1913 and the subsequent loss of the Balkan lands provided an impetus for Turkism to ascend over the ideologies of Ottomanism and Islamism. The defeat in World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the ensuing Independence War, paved the way for the adoption of Turkism as a political ideology. After the establishment of the Republic in 1923, nationalism became an official ideology and was a vital instrument in the nation-building process.

Dr. Rıza Nur, who lived in this period of Turkish history, was a witness to the major events, whether in the government or in the opposition. Being an ardent Turkist, he saw as his mission to propagate Turkism through the writing of different works. His book *Türk Tarihi* (Turkish History) particularly served this goal. He took upon the task of educating Turkish people and exalting the glories of Turks, demonstrating their contributions to civilizations, and refuting the false allegations about Turks. Dr. Rıza Nur's 14-volume work *Turkish History* was published over the period between 1924 and 1926 by the Ministry of Education with the support of Mustafa Kemal. The Turkish

¹ In the late 18th and 19th century, a handful of European Orientalists such as Frenchman Joseph de Guignes, Arthur Lumley Davids, Hungarian scholar Arminius Vambery, and Frenchman Leon Cahun, wrote about Turks in an admiring way. These Orientalists' scholarly works acquainted the Ottoman Turks with their language, ancient history, and with Turkic-speaking peoples living in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Iran. The most crucial influence was the flow of intellectuals from the Turkish provinces in Russia. A number of intellectuals nurtured the seeds of Pan-Turkist ideology among Turkish-speaking people in Russia. Among the most influential Turkists from Russia who moved to the Ottoman Empire were Ismail Bey Gasprinski, Huseyinzade Ali Bey, and especially Yusuf Akçura. See David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism 1876-1908* (Frank Cass, 1977), 7-14.

History Thesis as a part of the Kemalist national identity construction project came into being at the beginning of the 1930s. To explore whether Rıza Nur had any influence on the Turkish History Thesis or whether he kept a distance from it is one of the tasks of this study. Hence, this thesis will compare Rıza Nur's *Turkish History* with the history school textbook *Tarih: Tarihten Evelki Zamanlar ve Eski Zamanlar* (History: Pre-historic and Ancient Times), published in 1932, and *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (The Outlines of Turkish History), which together illustrate the Turkish History Thesis, to show their similarities and differences.

Having been alienated from the Kemalist regime and having spent many years in exile outside the borders of Turkey in the late 1920s and 1930s, Rıza Nur mostly became an unknown figure. The alienation was coupled with Nur's severe criticism towards Mustafa Kemal Pasha in his memoirs *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, which became known to the public after the 1960s. As in Turkey the cult of Atatürk is still dominant, and the publication of works insulting Atatürk's memory is considered to be a crime², this led to silence around Rıza Nur; alternatively, he came to be labeled as "mentally ill". Thus, either Rıza Nur remained unknown or he was associated with the criticism towards Atatürk. This factor resulted in the neglect of Rıza Nur's contributions, for instance, in the Independence War, in the Lausanne Peace Conference, and in other events in Turkish history. Rıza Nur's influences as a Turkist ideologue have also been overlooked.

Accordingly, there have been very few studies conducted on Rıza Nur. The primary features of these studies can be summarized: the existing works are mostly biographical; the main emphasis is laid on his autobiography; the discussion revolves around the question of whether the information provided in the memoirs is accurate or not; and a predominantly critical approach to Rıza Nur for his negative attitude to Atatürk can be observed. Rıza Nur as a Turkist ideologue and his works have never been studied. In particular, there is no study on *Turkish History*, which sheds light on how he imagines Turks and their role in history.

One of the earliest studies is Zakir Avşar's book *Bir Muhalifin Portresi: Dr. Rıza Nur* (The Portrait of an Opponent: Dr. Rıza Nur), published in 1992, which was further

² "The Law Concerning Crimes Against Atatürk", which protects Atatürk's memory from being insulted, was passed in 1951. The writers who produce works that insult Atatürk can be sentenced up to three years of imprisonment.

extended and republished in 2011 with the title of *Bir Türkçüniün Portresi: Dr Rıza Nur*,³ (The Portrait of a Turkist: Dr. Rıza Nur). On the whole, it is a biographical study based on Rıza Nur's memoirs. The author expresses the idea that while writing *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, Rıza Nur was not in a healthy mental state, and this is the reason for Nur's hateful approach and claims about Mustafa Kemal and İsmet İnönü, which do not correspond with the reality. However, Avşar also values Rıza Nur's service and devotion towards the Turkish nation.

Turgut Özakman in his work *Dr. Rıza Nur Dosyası*⁴ (1995) (The Dossier of Rıza Nur) explored the memoirs questioning the accuracy of the information. Noting that Rıza Nur did not offer any evidence to prove his claims and did not provide any documents, Özakman, referring to several documents, argues that what Rıza Nur narrated was full of falsification, errors, and imaginary stories. The author ascribed Rıza Nur's distortion of the truth to the fact that he was mentally ill and psychopathic, and therefore, his testimony cannot be accepted at face value.

A master's thesis entitled *Dr. Rıza Nur'un Hatıralarının bir Değerlendirmesi*⁵ (1996) (The Assessment of Dr. Rıza Nur's Memoirs) similarly discusses the credibility of the claims made by Rıza Nur, mostly in regard to Mustafa Kemal Pasha. For this aim, the minutes of parliamentary sessions were the source to demonstrate the inaccurate information. It is argued that Rıza Nur's complicated personal life, socio-economic situation in exile, and psychological state of mind affected Rıza Nur's approach and claims in *Hayat ve Hatıratım*.

Fahri Maden's *Sıradışı Bir Muhalif Rıza Nur*⁶ (2012) (Extraordinary Opponent Rıza Nur) has an exceptional approach. Fahri Maden himself was from Sinop (the birthplace of Rıza Nur); this became his main motivation in writing a biography of his compatriot. In contrast to other studies, Maden touched upon the memoirs very briefly and claimed that it can be used as a useful historical source. The author aimed to focus on the positive aspects to introduce Rıza Nur's contributions in Turkish politics and

³ B. Zakir Avşar, *Bir Muhalifin Portresi: Dr. Rıza Nur*, (Belgesel Kitaplar, 1992) ; B. Zakir Avşar, *Bir Türkçüniün Portresi: Dr Rıza Nur*, (Bengi Yayınları, 2011).

⁴ Turgut Özakman, *Dr. Rıza Nur Dosyası* (Bilgi Yayınevi, 1995).

⁵ Derya Sarı, *Dr. Rıza Nur'un Hatıralarının bir Değerlendirmesi (30Ekim 1918-1 Kasım 1922)*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi (T. C Marmara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İstanbul, 1996).

⁶ Fahri Maden, *Sıradışı Bir Muhalif Rıza Nur* (Roza Yayınevi, 2012).

academia to Turkish society, as Maden thinks that although Rıza Nur did not become a national hero, an outstanding politician, or a statesman, he had success in diplomatic life and left “everlasting works”. The striking characteristics of this work is the author’s sympathy/admiration towards Rıza Nur’s nationalism so he assesses Nur’s works such as the journal *Tanrıdağ* , his party program *Türkçü Partisi*, and *Türk Tarihi* as great contributions to Turkism.

Hülya Adak’s article “Who is afraid of Rıza Nur’s Autobiography”⁷ analyzes Rıza Nur’s *Hayat ve Hatıratım* in the framework of a specific genre of autobiographies produced as a reaction to the monopoly of the narrative of Turkish history in *Nutuk*⁸. This article has been a source of guidance in demonstrating the Rıza Nur-Atatürk conflict in the first chapter of this thesis.

As the main primary sources of this thesis, Rıza Nur’s autobiography *Hayat ve Hatıratım*⁹ and *Türk Tarihi*¹⁰, the school textbook *Tarih: Tarihten Evelki Zamanlar ve Eski Zamanlar*¹¹, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*¹² and *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Konferanslar-Müzakere Zabıtları*¹³ (The Minutes of the First Turkish History Congress) have been used.

Two remarkable books have been crucial for the exploration of the Turkish History Thesis: *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye’de ‘Resmi Tarih’ Tezinin Oluşumu 1929-1937*¹⁴ (Power and History: The Formation of the ‘Official History’ Thesis 1929-1937) by Büşra Ersanlı and *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*¹⁵ (From the Turkish History Thesis to the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis) by Etienne Copeaux. In particular,

⁷ Hülya Adak, “Who is afraid of Dr.Rıza Nur's autobiography?” *Autobiographical Themes in Turkish Literature: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, Akyıldız, Olcay and Kara , Halim and Sagaster, Börte (eds.), Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, October 2007, 125-141.

⁸ *Nutuk* (Speech) was a speech made by Mustafa Kemal at the Congress of the Republican People’s Party on October 15-20, 1927.

⁹ Dr. Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım* , Abdurrahman Dilipak (ed),(İşaret Yayınları, İstanbul, 1992), vol I-III.

¹⁰ Dr. Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, (Toker Yayınları, İstanbul, 1994), cilt 1-14.

¹¹ *Tarih: Tarihten Evelki Zamanlar ve Eski Zamanlar*, cilt I, (İstanbul, Devlet Matbaası, 1932).

¹² *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları:Kemalist Yönetimin Resmi Tarih Tezi*, 3. Basım , (Kaynak Yayınları ,1999).

¹³ *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Konferanslar-Müzakere Zabıtları* (Maarif Vekaleti, 1932).

¹⁴ Büşra Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye’de ‘Resmî Tarih’ Tezinin Oluşumu 1929-1937*, (İletişim Yayınları, 1996).

¹⁵ Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*, (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998).

Copeaux shows continuity in history writing tracing all the ideologues that might have influenced the Turkish History Thesis. Nevertheless, there is no remark about Rıza Nur.

The first chapter of this thesis will examine Rıza Nur's political ideas with a particular emphasis on his conflict with Atatürk, as well as his Turkist ideology with a focus on its differences with Kemalist nationalism. The discussion of these issues is crucial in better understanding Rıza Nur's position towards the Turkish History Thesis. In the second chapter, Rıza Nur's historical ideas, therefore *Turkish History*, and the reason behind writing *Turkish History* are scrutinized. The last chapter begins with a general examination of the Turkish History Thesis followed by a comparison between the Turkish History Thesis and Rıza Nur's *Turkish History*. In addition, Rıza Nur's stance toward the Turkish History Thesis is analyzed by exploring the observations he made on this issue in his autobiography.

CHAPTER 1

DR. RIZA NUR: POLITICAL IDEAS AND TURKIST IDEOLOGY

“Türkçülük için yaşadı, öldü”¹⁶

This chapter examines the political and nationalist ideology of Dr. Rıza Nur, who was a statesman, a politician, an intellectual, a Turkist, an author of more than 70 books, and one of the most controversial figures in Turkish history of the late 19th and early 20th century . He is characterized by some people as “mentally ill”¹⁷, while others admire his contributions to the Turkish nation and the role he played in the establishment of the Turkish state. The Turkists of his time portray him as a “national hero”¹⁸, a “saint”¹⁹, and an example of a patriot, idealist, symbol of struggle, diplomat, revolutionary, and above everything a great Turkist model for the young generation.²⁰ Nihal Atsız wrote about him, “If Rıza Nur had become the prime-minister instead of İsmet İnönü after the declaration of the Republic, Turkey would have become nationalized, Turkified, and strengthened, and many issues that cause trouble to us now would have completely been annihilated”.²¹

¹⁶ The phrase “He lived and died for Turkism” is written on the grave of Rıza Nur by Nihal Atsız.

Note: All the English translations from Turkish in this thesis are the work of the author of this thesis unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁷ Falih Rıfkı Atay in Dr. Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım Rıza Nur Kendini Anlatıyor*, Abdurrahman Dilipak (ed), (İşaret Yayınları, İstanbul, 1992), vol I, 55.

¹⁸ İhsan Unaner, “Rıza Nur ve Cesareti” in Ziya Yücel İlhan, *Sevenlerinin Kalemiyle Rıza Nur*, (İstanbul, B. Kervan Matbaası, 1962), 49.

¹⁹ Ziya Yücel İlhan, *Sevenlerinin Kalemiyle Rıza Nur*, (İstanbul, B. Kervan Matbaası, 1962), 24.

²⁰ Nejdet Sançar, “Örnek bir Hayat” in Ziya Yücel İlhan, *Sevenlerinin Kalemiyle Rıza Nur*, (İstanbul, B. Kervan Matbaası, 1962), 30.

²¹ Nihal Atsız “Rıza Nur'un Türkçülüğe En Büyük Hizmeti” in Ziya Yücel İlhan, *Sevenlerinin Kalemiyle Rıza Nur*, (İstanbul, B. Kervan Matbaası, 1962), 6.

1.1. Who is Dr. Rıza Nur?

Born in Sinop in 1878, Dr. Rıza Nur was proud to boast that he had descended from a pure Turkish family and had “pure Turkish blood” that was not mixed with foreign blood.²² Having graduated from the Medical Military school, he worked as a doctor at the Gülhane Military Hospital. At the age of 29, he got involved in politics, becoming the youngest member of parliament. First, he supported the Committee of Union and Progress; after a while he joined Prince Sabahattin’s opposition party *Ahrar Fırkası* (Liberal Party). He later became one of the founders of the *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası* (Freedom and Accord Party), which opposed the Committee of Union and Progress. After the Babiali coup in 1913, he was exiled from the country because of his critical articles against the Unionists and because of his book *Cem'iyet-i Hafiyye* (The Secret Society). Spending the time of his exile in Switzerland, France, and Egypt, he was able to return to the Ottoman Empire only after the 1918 Mudros Armistice was signed. It was during his time of exile in Egypt that Rıza Nur embarked on writing his 14-volume work entitled *Türk Tarihi* (Turkish History).

Joining the National Struggle in Ankara in 1919, Rıza Nur was elected as a member of parliament from Sinop in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. He was appointed as the Minister of Education in 1920 and Minister of Health in 1921. Rıza Nur was one of the delegates in the Moscow negotiations, which resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Moscow in 1921. In 1923 he was assigned as the second delegate along with İsmet İnönü at the Lausanne conference. After the Republic was established, he gradually became alienated from the Republican People's Party, culminating in another exile in 1926. After the assassination attempt on Atatürk at İzmir, as some old Unionists were executed, he decided to leave the country, fearing for his life.²³ Rıza Nur lived in Paris and Alexandria before the death of Atatürk. While in Paris, he published a journal

²² Dr. Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım Rıza Nur kendini anlatıyor*, Abdurrahman Dilipak (ed). (İşaret Yayınları, İstanbul, 1992), cilt I, 73-74.

²³ Dr. Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım Rıza Nur Atatürk kavgası*, Abdurrahman Dilipak (ed). (İşaret Yayınları, İstanbul, 1992), cilt III, 339.

Türkbilik Revüsü (The Review of Turkology) and wrote his memoirs *Hayat ve Hatıratım*.

Rıza Nur left a testament in Alexandria (1936). “If Mustafa Kemal and İsmet Paşa are still alive, bury me in Alexandria; after they die, move [me] to Sinop.”²⁴ However, he came back to Turkey after Mustafa Kemal's death. As a last contribution to Turkism, Rıza Nur published the weekly journal called *Tanrıdağ* (The Mountain of God literally, Tien Shan) from 8th May to 4th September, 1942. It is named after “Tangri” or “Tengri”, which was the major god of pagan belief before the Islamic era, and the term is still used in the Turkish language, simply meaning God. After the death of Rıza Nur in 1942, the journal ceased to exist.

Rıza Nur sent the copies of his memoirs *Hayat ve Hatıratım* to the Berlin State Library, *Paris Biblioteche Nationale*, and the British Museum, requesting that until 1960 the memoirs should be kept unavailable for readers.²⁵ He aimed to keep it away from Mustafa Kemal and İsmet Paşa, thinking that they would annihilate it, and it would not reach large masses.²⁶ For the first time, *Hayat ve Hatıratım* was found accidentally by Cavit Tütengil in the British Museum in 1961 and was published by Altındağ Yayınevi in 1967. However, the appearance of *Hayat ve Hatıratım* had negative repercussions on the image of Rıza Nur. The content of memoirs full of the language of blasphemy and criticism of Atatürk brought disappointment and even disrespect towards him among Turkists. After Rıza Nur came back from exile, young Turkists gathered around him; they considered him the fourth greatest leader of Turkism following Ali Suavi, Süleyman Paşa, and Ziya Gökalp. After getting to know about *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, even Rıza Nur's “adopted son” Nihal Atsız²⁷ said that he would not pronounce the name “Rıza Nur” anymore.²⁸ Faruk Alkpaya points out that with the rising tide of fascism and Nazism in the 1930s, the romantic ethnic-based Turkist

²⁴ Cavit Orhan Tütengil, *Dr. Rıza Nur Üzerine Üç Yazı-Yankılar-Belgeler*, (Güven Matbaası, 1965), 5.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 8

²⁶ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, I, 501.

²⁷ When Nihal Atsız was 20 years old, for the first time he got to know Rıza Nur by reading *Turkish History*; and he was inspired to the extent that he promised to give 5 kuruş per volume to his 15-year old brother Nejdet Sançar, provided Nejdet read the book. Nejdet read it with a great pleasure and refused to accept the 60 kuruş from his brother. When Rıza Nur was in Egypt during his second exile, Nihal Atsız started correspondence with Rıza Nur, asking to send one of Rıza Nur's books *Oğuzname*. After return from exile, Rıza Nur makes Nihal Atsız his adopted son in 1940. See B. Zakir Avşar, *Bir Türkçünün Portresi Dr Rıza Nur*, (Bengi Yayınları, 2011), 300- 303.

²⁸ B. Zakir Avşar, 324.

movement awakened; the new generation of Turkists was influenced by Rıza Nur and appropriated his ideas. It continued until the 1960s. After *Hayat ve Hatıratım* became public the Turkists' interest towards Rıza Nur weakened. Rıza Nur is now known for his criticism against the Unionists and especially Atatürk, rather than as a Turkist.²⁹

According to Zakir Avşar, Mustafa Kemal valued and admired Dr. Rıza Nur. Appointing him to high positions, such as the Minister of Education and Health, the Foreign Affairs Minister, and a delegate at the Moscow and Lausanne conferences, is an indicator that Mustafa Kemal thought highly of Rıza Nur and trusted his abilities and talents. Moreover, Kemal supported the publication of *Türk Tarihi*, valuing Rıza Nur's dedication and efforts.³⁰ Avşar also insisted that if *Hayat ve Hatıratım* had not showed up, many streets, schools, and neighborhoods in Turkey would be named after "Dr. Rıza Nur"; many academic studies would be conducted, and many works would be published. He would be remembered with great admiration. However, currently there is only one place that carries his name, *Dr. Rıza Nur İl Halk Kütüphanesi* (The Provincial Public Library of Dr. Rıza Nur), which was created by Nur's initiative in his birthplace Sinop.³¹

If we elaborate more on the political life of Rıza Nur, it can be summarized in the following way: switching from one party to another and criticism towards all political actors or parties, whether in the government or in the opposition. The following excerpt from the memoirs describes this statement quite well:

"Last time Mustafa Kemal said about me that he switches from one party to another; it is his habit. It is true. Even he called me flip-flopper (*fırıldak*). It is wrong. Who remained as constant as me for the nation and Turks' interest. From the beginning until now I have been firm to it. Yes, I also left his People's Party after the Lausanne treaty was signed. What should I have done if not leave? Become a tool? Switching is not my fault. It is an indispensable way. The fault is that these parties become corrupted."³²

²⁹ Faruk Alkpaya, "Rıza Nur." in Mehmet Ö. Alkan (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, (İletişim Yayınları, 2002, Vol.4), 374.

³⁰ B. Zakir Avşar, 13.

³¹ Ibid,325.

³² Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, I, 363.

Dr. Rıza Nur considers himself the pioneer in creating the opposition in Turkish legislative life. He claims that he was the first to write an article in *Yeni Gazete* (The New Newspaper), in which he criticized that the Ottoman Parliament (Meclis-i Mebusan) was under the rule of dictatorship, without freedom and the right to vote. He identified the parliament with a “lifeless machine”, the lever of which is in the hands of a few people, such as Talat, Cavit, and Cahit. These people set up a monopolized company (*şirket-i inhisariyye*). He mentions that this article dropped a bombshell as until then no one had ever uttered a word or written anything against the Committee of Union and Progress. It was the first article published against the “sacred” CUP. However, it opened the path to opposition, as it was followed by articles appearing in the newspapers one after another against the Unionists.³³ This is why after the Bab-ı Ali coup, when Rıza Nur was arrested, Cemal Pasha said to him before sending him to exile, “From your pen poison and blood drop... We will exile you from the country. Your body is harmful for the safety of this state.”³⁴

Even though Rıza Nur was one of the founders of *Hürriyet ve İttilaf Fırkası*, he later took the lead in the abolition of the party.

“I created and I was destroying it. ... In fact this repeated in my political life. I demolished *Ahrar Fırkası*. Also this one. For a few years I have been trying to break down *İttihat*. But I am very correct in this issue since a party is set up for a good intention, however, after a while it becomes detrimental for the nation. The detrimental thing must be immediately eliminated. In a party there are always filthy and corrupt people who mess up things. What *Hürriyet ve İttilaf Fırkası* has carried out later confirms my ideas ... If I could have also destroyed the CUP, maybe the state would not have experienced World War I and its disastrous consequences”.³⁵

For Rıza Nur the most important thing was to serve the Turkish nation. “What life, what troubles! What we suffer...These things happened to me because of the

³³ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, I, 285-287.

³⁴ Rıza Nur, *Gurbet Dağarcığı*, in Dr. Rıza Nur, *Siyasi Risaleler*, Ahmet Nezi̇h Galitekin (ed.) (Şehir Yayınları , 2005) , 55.

³⁵ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, I, 363.

homeland, nation, and righteousness”.³⁶ “And what is this for: for the nation... For it [the nation] the imprisonment, exile, the danger of death, the execution, insult, being dismissed from the position, the prohibition from maintenance, exile from the homeland, and everything”.³⁷

The fact that for Rıza Nur the national interest was above everything can be displayed in one example. After the Mudros Armistice he returned to Turkey; even though he had been exiled by the Unionists, he was ready to support them. He started to write in favor of the Unionists and propagate the idea that everyone should be united.

“No one suffered and was harmed by the Unionists as much as me. They called me a traitor. They sent me to jail. ... Now Rıza Nur is advocating them. When they [the Unionists] were powerful, he [Rıza Nur] fought against them, and he was defeated and wretched; when they [the Unionists] are weak, he has become their defender. What can we do? The problem is not personal, it is national.... the nation's interests require this. Everything must be forgotten; everyone must be united”.³⁸

After the declaration of the Republic, Rıza Nur was not included in the government. He became resentful both of Mustafa Kemal and İsmet İnönü. In Rıza Nur’s narrative, Latife Hanım told Rıza Nur's wife that Kemal had included Rıza Nur in the government, but that İsmet İnönü objected. Rıza Nur was sure that both of them did not want him, as the state had been established, there were no significant things to do, and they did not need him anymore.³⁹ Later İsmet Pasha offered him a few positions, such as Istanbul delegacy and ambassador to Berlin and London, but he rejected these positions. Rıza Nur started to plan not to work with these men anymore and not to accept any position offered. He made a decision to leave the parliament as well; however, he did not want to completely sever ties with them, bearing in mind that the publication of *Turkish History* had to be completed.⁴⁰ Kazım Karabekir, Ali Fuad, Refet, and Rauf planned to establish an opposition party and suggested that Rıza Nur join them; again he refused.⁴¹

³⁶ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, I, 524.

³⁷ Ibid, 525.

³⁸ Ibid, 531.

³⁹ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 270.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 280-281.

⁴¹ Ibid, 279-280.

1.2. Rıza Nur's Conflict with Mustafa Kemal

The third volume of *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, which is entitled *Rıza Nur Atatürk Conflict (Rıza Nur Atatürk Kavgası)*, depicts Rıza Nur's attitude towards Mustafa Kemal and the Kemalist regime. He not only condemns Mustafa Kemal as a public figure and disapproves of the Kemalist reforms and revolution, but also commits blasphemy (which is censored by the publisher) and makes fun of Kemal's personality and actions.

First of all, Rıza Nur criticizes *Nutuk*⁴² harshly. It has been argued that Rıza Nur's autobiography is a typical response to his dismissal from “the monopoly of the Turkish national narrative in *Nutuk*”. Since the Turkish national history was monopolized after Mustafa Kemal's *Nutuk* in 1927, it was followed by the production of a number of “historically and politically specific genre of auto/biographies” and “non-official self-na(rra)tions” written by the historical and political figures whose role in the Independence Struggle had been dismissed or degraded in *Nutuk*.⁴³

Dr. Rıza Nur criticizes *Nutuk*, because Mustafa Kemal took credit for everything, disregarding the contributions of the other actors in the National Struggle. He thinks that the goal of *Nutuk* is to prove a number of people who showed patriotism and served the nation to be wrong; to discredit them and elevate Mustafa Kemal; to demonstrate that there is only one genius and that others have not done anything; and everything was done by Kemal single-handedly.⁴⁴ He feels irritated by the costs of *Nutuk*'s publication, which he considers to have been taken from people's pockets, and the 6-day life of the members of parliament,⁴⁵ whom he compares to “sheep listening to the shepherd's pipe”⁴⁶. According to Rıza Nur, it is not a historical document, as it is full of fabrication

⁴² *Nutuk* (Speech) was a speech made by Mustafa Kemal at the Congress of the Republican People's Party on October 15-20, 1927. It took 36 hours (6 days) from him to deliver the speech. Kemal reported the history of the Turkish national movement from 1919 to 1924; the speech ended with the emergence of Progressive Republican Party (PRP) in November 1924. The ensuing events up to 1927 constitute only 1.5 percent of the speech. The main theme is the criticism of the former leaders of PRP, and it is a justification of the expulsion of Kemal's opponents over the period between 1925 and 1926. See Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London I. B. Tauris, 1998), 183.

⁴³ Hülya Adak, “Who is afraid of Dr. Rıza Nur's autobiography?” *Autobiographical Themes in Turkish Literature: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, Akyıldız, Olcay and Kara, Halim and Sagaster, Börte (eds.), Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, October 2007, 125-141.

⁴⁴ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 52-53. Also refer to Hülya Adak, “Who is afraid of Dr. Rıza Nur's autobiography?”, 134.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 53.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 33.

and a number of significant events have been omitted. He labels it as a “personal struggle” and states it qualifies as a *medihname* (eulogy), the epic of a person. According to Rıza Nur, *Nutuk* is full of pride, disdain, and prophecies. It aims to slander Mustafa Kemal’s opponents; Kemal wants to justify the executions and killings. Every single sentence in the speech portrays the image that the entire National Struggle was spearheaded by Mustafa Kemal.⁴⁷

As has been underlined, Rıza Nur's role in the National Struggle was overlooked in *Nutuk*. Moreover, in *Nutuk* Mustafa Kemal said that an “extreme patriot” Rıza Nur promoted the Albanian uprising against the Turks during a crucial period of time when the Turks abandoned Rumelia.⁴⁸ Rıza Nur severely attacks this aspect in *Hayat ve Hatıratım*. He points out that everyone was aware about this case, as he had written about it in his book *Hürriyet ve İtilafın İcyüzü* (The Real Truth about the Freedom and Accord Party), and he is convinced that Kemal had read it. He asserts that Mustafa Kemal fabricated this story, since the Albanian uprising was not related to the loss of Rumelia, which occurred during the Balkan war. The uprising had happened long before it, and Rıza Nur encouraged had Albanians not against Turks, but against the Unionist government; it did not have any nationalistic context. He points to his Turkism. “I act against Turks! Is it possible?...I am a Turk who is from Sinop, family known, and for two hundred years not even one drop of alien blood has mixed both on my mother's and father’s side.”⁴⁹ “I have not been a Turkist for only 6 years. I have written this in my published works for a long time. One of them is *Turkish History*, which reflects my 15-year efforts... Only this one is sufficient to prove that I am an old Turkist.”⁵⁰ He assesses this statement as Mustafa Kemal's intention to malign his political past and defame him. He further explains that if he had not left for Paris and had accepted the offers to be an ambassador or the Minister of Education, and that if he were a “sycophant, flunkey, and dishonest”, Mustafa Kemal would not have added the claims against Rıza Nur in *Nutuk*.⁵¹ Rıza Nur finalizes his counterarguments in the words, “I wish I were young as I was at that time, and triggered the uprising against Mustafa Kemal, who is more bloody, tyrannical, and rascal than the previous rulers, and

⁴⁷ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 307-308.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 289.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 289.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 288.

⁵¹ Ibid, 289-290.

succeeded in toppling him down, and saved the nation”⁵².

Another “service to the nation” of Rıza Nur's that is neglected in *Nutuk* is his idea on the abolition of the sultanate. In his own account, Rıza Nur is the person who suggested the abolition of sultanate. The two governments, that of Ankara and Istanbul, were invited to the Lausanne conference. This would mean that there would be not one, but two Turkeys; instead of confronting the enemy, they would struggle with each other. Having considered this danger, Rıza Nur suggested the idea of the abolition of the sultanate in order to preclude the representation of the Istanbul government in the negotiations. He explains that his “sacred dream” to have religion separated from the state is among the other reasons that he suggested this idea. He perceived the absence of secularism as the major reason behind all of the problems of Turkey in the past.⁵³ Rıza Nur prepared a decree, which he named *Teşrinisani Kararı* (November Decree), which was signed by all the deputies of the Parliament, and in the end by Atatürk. He considers this as one of his greatest services to the nation and the state. In the parliament the decree was accepted with a big applause; even a French delegate, who was present there, congratulated Rıza Nur, saying, “Mustafa Kemal entered Izmir. He gained a big victory. Yes, but what you did is much more significant. This nation might forget Mustafa Kemal but cannot forget you.”⁵⁴ The fact that in *Nutuk* Mustafa Kemal does not even mention Rıza Nur as the author of the decree makes him indignant. Rıza Nur asserts that in *Nutuk*, whatever is expressed about this event is false, and that Kemal attributes all the honor to himself. “In reality his [Mustafa Kemal's] honor is merely to give a signature like all other members of parliament. He did not have any idea about the abolition of the sultanate and the separation of religion and the state. His honor is as simple and small as putting a signature.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, Mustafa Kemal's declaration that he created a secular state is also counteracted by Rıza Nur. “Kemal did not even know the meaning of secular. He had not even heard this word.”⁵⁶

Rıza Nur analyses the whole text of *Nutuk*, pinpointing the drawbacks and falsifications. For example, against the claim of Atatürk described in *Nutuk* that he

⁵² Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 290.

⁵³ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve hatıratım Rıza Nur İnönü Kavgası*, Abdurrahman Dilipak (ed),(İşaret Yayınları, İstanbul, 1992), cilt II, 183-184. Also refer for this topic to Hülya Adak, “Who is afraid of Dr. Rıza Nur's autobiography?”, 136.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 185.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 186.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 187.

planned the National Struggle in Istanbul, went to Samsun, and carried it out, Rıza Nur makes the argument that the uprising was planned and started by the nation. In every region various guerrilla groups were formed to defend the country. It was not one person's idea, but that of thousands of people. He claims that Mustafa Kemal moved to Anatolia and joined the struggle just to take personal revenge on the sultan. However, Kemal appropriates all of the honor.⁵⁷

According to Rıza Nur, Mustafa Kemal works only for his personal ambition, not for the nation's interest, and justifies his demands with the need to defend the country. He is frustrated by the fact that Atatürk has always requested a position and rank, for instance, the title of Gazi, the position of the commander-in-chief, and an award of millions of liras.⁵⁸ The Turkish army was defeated on the Eskişehir and Afyon fronts by the Greeks. The Turks were faced with the inevitable fall of Ankara. The Meclis (Grand National Assembly of Turkey) was in a hopeless situation; there was even talk that the government should move to Kayseri. Rıza Nur portrays the situation as one in which no one knew what to do and Mustafa Kemal was thinking of fleeing. Rıza Nur offered to form a delegation and send it to the front to explore the situation.⁵⁹ After a study, Rıza Nur prepared a report with a plan, and he was sure that the Meclis would accept it, because he had become their only hope.⁶⁰ When he went to the Meclis to present it, he describes that, “Mustafa Kemal was waiting for me in the corridor; he met me in anxiety. With a yellow face, he [Mustafa Kemal] looked with eyes expressing, “Help!”... The good old days!... “What are we going to do? What will you do?” he said. He became like a lamb.”⁶¹ After Rıza Nur’s speech, Kemal approached him and said, “*Yahu* (Man!). What did you do? You are so wonderful!...I did not know [it].”⁶² Rıza Nur proposed that Mustafa Kemal become the commander-in-chief of the army. This was rejected by Kemal, who claimed that the defeat is out of question, and he accused Rıza Nur that the latter wanted to make him the commander-in-chief in order to disgrace his reputation. Rıza Nur became outraged at this, “What is this man [Mustafa Kemal]? The huge nation is getting destroyed; he is thinking about the reputation. At least he can feel embarrassed and not talk. This is the moment that I completely hated this man; I

⁵⁷ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 22-25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 49.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 188. Also refer for this topic to Hülya Adak, “Who is afraid of Dr. Rıza Nur's autobiography?”, 136

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 195.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 196.

⁶² *Ibid*, 200.

started to bear a big animosity towards him.”⁶³ For three days the Meclis tried to convince Kemal. In the end Kemal agreed to accept; in return he demanded that all the legislative and executive authority should be granted to him. Rıza Nur speculates that Kemal wanted to become a despot and that he intended to make laws without consulting anyone. This led to a huge quarrel in the Meclis. Again it was Rıza Nur's effort to convince the Parliament to grant the authority, considering that the repulsion of the enemy was the most crucial thing at that moment, and that there was no better option than Kemal, since Ismet and Fevzi Pasha had proved to be bad commanders.⁶⁴

After the Sakarya victory Rıza Nur and the members of parliament became outraged when Mustafa Kemal asked for the title of Gazi and 4 million liras as an award. Rıza Nur was not surprised to see that in *Nutuk* Mustafa Kemal ascribed the measures proposed by Rıza Nur in the report to himself, and does not mention Rıza Nur.⁶⁵ In *Nutuk* Kemal proclaimed that the Meclis has granted the title Gazi to him,⁶⁶ and tried to demonstrate that the defeats in Afyon and Eskişehir had been allowed by him purposely for strategic reasons. However, Rıza Nur found out in his research at the front that the defeats had been the fault of Kemal and Ismet Pasha.⁶⁷

Afterwards, Mustafa Kemal gives a speech in Bursa showing that he has foreseen all the steps. “No matter what happens, we will have victory. I foresaw the talent in this Nation. I defeated the enemy”. Rıza Nur does not refrain from giving his comment on this speech. “In the Meclis he [Mustafa Kemal] never said, “I will defeat the enemy”. On the contrary, he was fleeing from hopelessness. For a few days he made efforts not to accept to be the commander-in-chief... He is busy propagating himself. His pride grows every day. Let's look how far it will go. Maybe soon he will declare himself God, like the old Roman dictators”.⁶⁸

In addition, Dr. Rıza Nur expresses explicit condemnation of the reforms implemented by Kemal and the oppressive regime created after the declaration of the Republic.

⁶³ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 200.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 201.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 212.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 220.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 183, 190.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 213-214.

Emphasizing that the idea for the hat reform is taken by Mustafa Kemal from Rıza Nur's work *Turkish History*, he does not refrain from criticizing this reform. In Rıza Nur's words, the only purpose for this reform is that Mustafa Kemal wants to be called an innovator (*müceddid*) and for it to be accepted by everyone that Kemal carries out reforms for regeneration. Rıza Nur indicates that, in fact, the hat reform is not innovative; some people started to wear hats during the Abdülhamid period. The usage of hats was in the process of gradually becoming a common phenomenon. He further spells out that Mustafa Kemal did it to show off and to posture as a genius. Then Rıza Nur puts forth his arguments to show how it damages society, as it is a control over the bodies of people; it does not mean freedom, as a person can wear whatever he wants. Among other negative consequences of the hat reform, he mentions that people's spirituality is broken; people think that they became *gavur* (infidel). He also considers the financial costs as an enormous harm to the economy.⁶⁹

Following all the steps that Mustafa Kemal undertakes, Rıza Nur labels them as a “new fashion”. He proclaims that a “statue fashion” has started. For him it is ridiculous that Mustafa Kemal had his statues made. Rıza Nur makes fun of Kemal placing his statues in so many places by stating that in case of the need to have another person's statue, there will be no place. He agonizes over the fact that Turks have many hero commanders, writers, and politicians who deserve to have their statues. Rıza Nur feels distressed that millions of liras are squandered, for the statues have been made in Europe. He is not surprised that an economic crisis happened in the aftermath of such elaborate expenditures.⁷⁰ Defining it as a “reform fashion”, Rıza Nur mocks how Kemal offers a new reform every day, stating Kemal has infected his members of parliament with this “reform disease” bigger than cholera.⁷¹

Rıza Nur is highly critical of the adoption of the Swiss Legal Code. He feels sorrow about how the Turks cannot get away from foreign traditions. They get rid of Arabic customs and now adopt Christian traditions. Nevertheless, Rıza Nur gives preference to Arabs, since they are Muslims.⁷² The censorship and monopolization of the press and giving voice to such newspapers as *Milliyet* (The Nation) and *Hakkimiyet-i Milliyet* (The National Sovereignty), which presented the situation as paradise and did

⁶⁹ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 296-297.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 310.

⁷¹ Ibid, 312.

⁷² Ibid, 313.

nothing but elevate Kemal to the level of God, made Rıza Nur more exasperated. He makes fun of the titles ascribed to Mustafa Kemal in the newspapers. For instance, Gazi is “genius”, “you are prophet. However, you are greater than prophet,” or “almighty creator”. Manifesting similarity to Abdülhamid, he is astonished to find out new titles, such as *Ulu Gazi*, *Yüce Gazi*, *Kudret Haliki*, *Mukaddes Reis* and other titles.⁷³ Rıza Nur narrates that a journalist who came from France, interviewed a few young people in Beyazid and asked the question of how the Turkish nation can live without religion. Three of them said, “No, we have religion, new religion”. They showed Kemal's statue and said, “this is our Allah”. Rıza Nur reacted to this in the following manner, “When I read this, I cursed these three young people. I felt sorry for this nation, I got hurt”.⁷⁴

Rıza Nur was particularly aggravated when Mustafa Kemal introduced the alphabet reform. He finds it to be enormously damaging as all the old books and government documents will be obsolete, remarking that they will become like hieroglyphs. He is especially concerned that this treasure of knowledge (*hazine-i irfani*) will be lost, and assesses this reform as “horrible killing, stupidity, and deep ignorance”.⁷⁵ He again laments for the millions of liras spent for the expenditures and attributes the economic crisis to such expenditures.⁷⁶ Rıza Nur does not stop himself from kidding that Atatürk has become “alphabet Gazi.”⁷⁷

Rıza Nur criticizes the regime, saying that people got rid of the sultanate and dictatorship and instead had an even worse dictatorship. He equates the Grand National Assembly to a “childish toy”, as it does not have any authority and power.⁷⁸ After *Takrir-i Sükun* (The Law on the Restoration of the Order), which was adopted after the Sheyh Said Uprising, and the Independence Tribunals were formed to execute the political opponents of Mustafa Kemal, Rıza Nur acknowledges that “even during the reign of Abdülhamid there was no such dictatorship”.⁷⁹

Other points that on which Rıza Nur's ideas diverge from those of Mustafa Kemal are on the abolition of the Caliphate and westernization. Considering the former as a

⁷³ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 314. Also refer for this topic to Hülya Adak, “Who is afraid of Dr. Rıza Nur's autobiography?”, 133.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 365.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 353.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 352.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 351.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 291.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 309.

serious mistake made by Mustafa Kemal, he lists the advantages of having the Caliphate. He believes the reason that the Turks were able to sign a beneficial peace treaty is that the Turks were promoted in the eyes of Great Britain by the Indians. In addition, the Indians supported them financially during the National Struggle. Turks were also able to gain economic benefits from having the Caliphate as Turkish products would be very popular in Muslim countries. In Rıza Nur's words, "The poor Islamic world remained without a head". He envisages the Caliph to be an institution similar to the papacy in the Christian world.⁸⁰

Rıza Nur conceives of the Europeanization and modernization politics of Kemal as disastrous. He thinks that Mustafa Kemal destroyed Turkish originality and smashed all the culture, traditions, holy legacy of ancestors, and customs; Rıza Nur termed this as vandalism.⁸¹ According to him, Turks should adopt only the science, technique, methods and working practices of Europeans. Other aspects are dangerous. Young people go to Europe for education and become charmed with Europe and despise Turkishness. On the other hand, he thinks that the modernist revolution carried out by Kemal is nothing more than a "wardrobe revolution" because the genuine revolution happens only in the mind.⁸²

There are a number of other contributions of Dr. Rıza Nur that he feels have been overlooked or "plagiarized" from him. About the abolition of the Sharia Ministry he says, "I first proposed when the government in Ankara was formed. Halide and Celal Arif objected, but Mustafa Kemal accepted. This is my idea...They [the Kemalists] are doing the unification of education. When I was the Minister of Education, I was trying to do this and to bring forward [the unification of education] frequently in the official statement of the parliament. These things they learned from me."⁸³ Rıza Nur claims that he proposed the name "Türkiye"⁸⁴ and was one of the members of the committee which designed *Misak-i Milli* (The National Pact). He contributed to the latter by objecting to the inclusion of Syria in *Misak-i Milli*, arguing that Syria is not Turkish and will become trouble for the state. Rıza Nur indicates that Mustafa Kemal wrote in *Nutuk* that Kemal himself sketched *Misak-i Milli*, whereas Rıza Nur asserts that it was sketched by the

⁸⁰ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 277.

⁸¹ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, II, 521.

⁸² *Ibid*, 522.

⁸³ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 277.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 54.

Istanbul Parliament, and that it does not belong to Kemal.⁸⁵

Rıza Nur in his memoirs recalls the case when Mustafa Kemal wanted to make Turkey Bolshevik, as Kemal considered that Bolshevism could save the country. When Atatürk brought this issue to the agenda, because of Rıza Nur's objection this plan was canceled. Rıza Nur points out that when the Turkish delegation was in Lausanne, and it was a critical time when there was the threat that the war could restart, everyone in Ankara was frightened, and Mustafa Kemal said, “Do not be afraid. We have Rıza Nur there. He saved the state from communism; now he will save us also from this situation”. Rıza Nur thinks that saving Turkey from communism was his major service to the Turkish nation.⁸⁶

1.3. Rıza Nur's Turkist Ideology and Kemalist Nationalism

Faruk Alkpaya pointed out that Dr. Rıza Nur stood in opposition to Abdülhamid II, to the Committee of Union and Progress after the 2nd Constitutional Era, and after the Republican period to Mustafa Kemal and the Republican People's Party in secret, and in spite of these changes, his Turkist ideology never changed.⁸⁷ This observation summarizes Rıza Nur's character quite well.

Rıza Nur writes in the article “Turkish Nationalism” published in the journal *Tanrıdağ*, “Nation does not have any connection to culture; nation is a matter of race [and] is a matter of blood”.⁸⁸ This sheds light on his Turkism, which acknowledges race and blood as the main hallmarks of the nation. He stresses the threat of having other ethnicities among Turks, whom he singles out as “alien elements”. In the same article he elaborates on the “alien elements”. His key point is that heterogeneous political-social unions are continuously subject to the disease of rebellion; these type of unions go through crises, finally fall apart, and perish. He highlights that the most solid and steady pillar to hold the state is nationalism. The Ottoman Empire caught a disease because of parasites; the political parasites are alien elements. In all phases of history,

⁸⁵ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, I, 541-542.

⁸⁶ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 76-77.

⁸⁷ Faruk Alkpaya, 374.

⁸⁸ Rıza Nur, “Türk Nasyonalizmi”, *Tanrıdağ*, sayı 1, 8 Mayıs 1942, 4.

alien elements have become the reason for decline. When Turkish power weakened, the alien elements turned to the Turks' enemies and devastated the Turks.⁸⁹ He identifies three kinds of Turkish nationalism: Turanism, Turkism, and Anatolianism. Turanism merged into the second one. He regards Anatolianism as a weak approach, since it accepts only Anatolian Turks as superior. According to Rıza Nur, the most viable is racial Turkism, which encompasses all Turks.⁹⁰

Rıza Nur wrote the *Türkçü* (Turkist) Party program (*Türkiye'nin Yeni Baştan İhyası ve Fırka Programı*) in Paris in 1929, with the goal of reviving Turkey in the future by replacing the Republican People's Party. In this program one can find the structured account of his ideology. "We are conducting a revolution and it is called "Glorious national revolution."... We are not conducting Kemalism like Mustafa Kemal." He finds the difference from Kemalism in the fact that the latter values the person above everything, above all holy national, religious, and social values. Rıza Nur calls his own revolution "Turkism" and uses it in the meaning of an umbrella, like Hellenism. All the principles can be defined as "Turkist national faith". Rıza Nur classifies nations as political nations, religious nations, and racial nations. "We have seen in both Austria and the Ottoman Empire that religious and political nations are like ice falling into pieces. We have seen Albanians, Arabs and others who have grown up with our bread and revenues. We have experienced their betrayal."⁹¹ He notes that after these historical events that are based on tangible evidence that whoever accepts the nation as a political and religious entity is either brainless, crazy, pursues personal interest, or nurtures murder against Turks.

"We are firm in the belief that nation is based on blood. We are harsh nationalists because among us we still have various elements and factions who are waiting for an opportunity to affront and betray Turks. Those who do not carry out "national blood revenge and defense" against them [the elements] breed snakes in their arms. If they [the elements] speak like Turks, dress like Turks, and follow Turkish interest, they will be more than welcome. But not only single, hundreds of cases showed the opposite. All these lessons teach us: Turkey must be for the people who share the same religion, the same language, the same mindset, and the same blood. Those who disagree with this let them leave the country."⁹²

⁸⁹ Rıza Nur, "Türk Nasyonalizmi", 4-5.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 6.

⁹¹ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, II, 518.

⁹² Ibid, 518-519.

Rıza Nur's conclusion is: "In this sky, not even non-Turkish sparrows can fly. In this territory non-Turkish grass cannot grow".⁹³

The examination of his memoirs displays Rıza Nur's approach towards "alien elements", which encompasses not only non-Muslim minorities in Turkey but also non-Turkish Muslims. In his words, when he became the Minister of Health, he fired all Albanians, Arabs, Jews and other non-Turks working in the Health Ministry. He did the same when he was the Minister of Education. He narrates one case in the memoirs. Rıza Nur was informed that one of the teachers in Konya, who was originally Albanian, had said that for him it was not sufficient to take revenge on the Turks in this world; he would do it in the afterlife. He would stand on the top of the path and topple all the Turks to hell. Rıza Nur immediately not only fired him from the job but also ordered the governor to expel him from the country saying, "If you do not like the Turks, why are you serving them? How can you eat the Turks' bread and then nurture hatred against them? You are a scoundrel. Go and serve the Albanians."⁹⁴

When Rıza Nur went to Moscow for negotiations, he learned that most of the officials in the Turkish embassy were Circassians and that it had become a gathering-place of the Circassian committee. "I was about to go crazy. The poor Turk gives [their] salary and sends officials, and they serve not Turks, but others.... However, Turk! The fault is yours. If you make Circassians officials, they will do it like this. You did not smarten up."⁹⁵

Another example is related to the delegation of Bekir Sami, who headed to Russia to negotiate for a treaty and ask help from Russia. Chicherin, the Russian delegate, asked for Van for the Armenians. Bekir Sami promised to persuade the Meclis to hand Van to the Armenians, provided the Russians give independence to the Ossetians. Rıza Nur's reaction is interesting. "When I learned this, I moaned. A person who was raised on Turkish bread and Turkish education was being sent to Russia to ask support in the most tragic moment of the Turkish state. He abandons the Turkish business and makes efforts to reach independence for his nation, the Ossetians."⁹⁶

⁹³ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, II, 520.

⁹⁴ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 228.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 255.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 92-94.

When Rauf Bey was appointed as the head of the delegation for the Lausanne conference, Rıza Nur opposed the appointment of Rauf Bey to this position since Rauf Bey was not a Turk. Rıza Nur thought that there is no Turk who can do the business of the Turk, and that the Turks are so incompetent that an Abaza should take the lead in this important job. Rıza Nur told Mustafa Kemal, “Pasha! Is there no other deserving Turk so that an Abaza was appointed to such an important position [?]...”⁹⁷ Rıza Nur suggested that İsmet Pasha can be suitable for the position, since he is a Turk. “To my surprise what a mistake I made!... I became the reason that an Abaza was dismissed, and instead a Kurd from Bitlis took his place!... When I learned this in Lausanne, I had a stroke... “How could I know? This man shows himself as a pure Turk. He speaks like a Turkist.”⁹⁸

In his *Turkist party* program Rıza Nur imagines Turkey as a state where a Directorate of Racial Affairs should be formed, which would be entrusted to check the race of officers, teachers, and members of parliament; all non-Turks would be dismissed. It would also prohibit these officials from marrying foreigners or non-Muslims.⁹⁹ Another point in the program stipulates that no “foreign” nationals must be allowed to have higher education in Turkey. He thinks this is the most important point for the future of the Turks, as Turks had important lessons from history. The Bulgarians, Arabs, and Albanians who fought for their independence had studied at Turkish schools.¹⁰⁰ He resorts to criticizing Mustafa Kemal for allowing non-Turkish people, such as Albanians, Bulgarians, and Circassians, to study at the universities, mostly at state expenses, and, moreover, for sending them to Europe to gain education.¹⁰¹

Very frequently Rıza Nur derogates other people because of their ethnic origins, as his belief is that having only Turkish origins is a positive virtue. He dislikes the fact that because of his service in Düzce and Bolu during the Independence War, Çerkez Ethem was applauded at the parliament and received the title of a National Hero. Rıza Nur’s antipathy is caused by the thought, “How can a Circassian become a national hero?”¹⁰² One of the main reasons that he hates Mustafa Kemal is his conviction that Kemal is not a Turk; Kemal’s father is unknown, and he might be of Serbian or

⁹⁷ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, II, 180-181.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 182.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 523.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 516-517.

¹⁰¹ Nur, 268.

¹⁰² Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 85-86.

Bulgarian descent.¹⁰³ Very often, when he wants to attack Atatürk's actions or speeches, Rıza Nur immediately points to Kemal's origins. For instance, in *Nutuk* Atatürk mentioned that “for success in big issues it is essential to have a leader that has unwavering abilities and power”. Rıza Nur confronts this by not only claiming that in critical moments Mustafa Kemal wanted to flee from Ankara, and that it was very difficult to prevent Kemal, but also that “he [Kemal] wants to prove that in the Turkish nation there is only one person and that person is Mustafa Kemal; there is no other skilled person. If we consider the rumors about his [Kemal's] father, even his Turkishness is under doubt.”¹⁰⁴

Finally, being proud of his pure Turkish blood and on all occasions assuring that his family has not mixed with alien blood, Rıza Nur was reluctant to marry a woman whom he liked but was an Albanian. “I definitely need a Turk. Until now, other blood has not mixed with our family.”¹⁰⁵ This is what he thought.

Despite the fact that he preaches racial Turkishness, “The basic, most just, and most vital issue for us is to make sure that no people of another race, language or religion remain in our country”¹⁰⁶, a controversy revolves around the notion that Rıza Nur also does not exclude the assimilation of non-Turkish Muslims. This is promulgated in several articles of his *Turkist Party* program. First, he demands that “the foreigners who become a Turkish citizen, regardless of Turkish race or other race, cannot be a minister, member of parliament, teacher, or officer”. Nevertheless, he continues in the same article that, “after one generation those who get assimilated with Turkism and forget their language can have the right to it”¹⁰⁷. At another point he asserts that when the Albanians and other non-Turks become deputies, they cause much damage to the state. Yet, he states that “they can become deputies given that the father is settled in Turkey, he is born in Turkey, and has forgotten the Albanian language”.¹⁰⁸ He sees as the main mission of the Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*) the Turkification of foreign ethnicities, especially the Kurds.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, III, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 33-34.

¹⁰⁵ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, I, 318.

¹⁰⁶ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, II, 260.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 466.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 483.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 503.

Being also a dedicated Panturkist, Rıza Nur propagates his irredentist ideas in the *Turkist Party* program. Rıza Nur thinks that as Turkey is surrounded by enemies and that, notably, European colonialism is the “azrael” of the Turks and the East as a whole, Turkey and Turkism can be sustained only if a huge confederacy comprising the Caucasian Turks and the Azeris of Iran is formed. His idea is that every state in the confederation will be a sovereign republic with its own parliament and president, while the foreign affairs, economy, finances and military will be common. Turkey should form a general parliament, and there will be representatives from each republic. He thinks that because of the distance and variety of Turkic languages, it is not realistic to include all the Turks spread in Siberia and China. However, it is possible to create a confederation in Central Asia as well and name it Turkestan, which will again coordinate its foreign, economic, and financial affairs with Turkey.¹¹⁰

To make a distinction between Rıza Nur’s Turkist ideology and Kemalist nationalism, it is crucial to refer to interpretations on the definition of the Turkish national identity in the Kemalist discourse in the existing literature. Some studies claim that Kemalist nationalism was initially territorial and later shifted to the ethnic nationalism, while other authors argue that it displays elements of both civic and ethnic types of nationalism. There are also other definitions of Kemalist nationalism in the literature.

Before discussing these definitions, it is necessary to underline the differentiation between the civic versus ethnic models of nationalism. According to Anthony Smith, civic nationalism is based on historic territory, a legal-political community, legal political equality of members, common civic culture, and ideology, whereas the ethnic concept of nationality emphasizes the significance of birth, common descent, genealogy, language, popular mobilization, customs, and traditions.¹¹¹ In the literature these types of nationalism are also named by different nationalism theorists as the French and German models, respectively, or voluntaristic and organic/romantic/cultural nationalism, respectively. The main difference between these models is that people who were incorporated into multi-national empires or were politically disunited, such as the Germans and Italians, stressed ethnicity rather than territorial limits. This kind of nationalism was influenced by romanticism and tended to look back upon memories of

¹¹⁰ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, II, 514-515.

¹¹¹ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Harmondsworth penguin, 1991), 9-12.

past glory, placing a strong emphasis on language and culture as criterion of nation and stressing the supremacy of nations.¹¹² Nationalism resting on language or race contributed to the rise of “Pan” ideologies and movements, which aimed to promote the solidarity or political union of groups scattered in different states.¹¹³ The Romantics emphasized the language union in the beginning, and later this came to denote “blood union” or race. This is the case with the concept of “Turan”. Turan was a name for a language family, which along with different Turkic languages included Finnish and Magyar. A linguist, Max Mueller, made a distinction between the Turanian and Aryan languages and put forth the idea that the language family was tantamount to the racial family (the Turanian race), as it was believed that the people speaking the same language had a political union in the past.¹¹⁴

With regards to race, in the 19th century anthropological studies were conducted on the physical features such as the skull and color of the skin, which led to the classification of mankind into different races. This anthropological research paved the way for the emergence of racial theories. The idea of race was expounded by Frenchman Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau. He brought forward the idea of the superiority of the White/Aryan race and claimed that this race established the greatest ancient civilizations in India, Egypt, China, and the West.¹¹⁵

Soner Cagaptay, who provides an extensive analysis of Kemalist nationalism, distinguishes three categories of Turkishness. The first is territorial, the second is religious, and the third and least inclusive is ethno-religious.¹¹⁶ He argues that throughout the 1920s Turkishness had been mostly defined independently of race and that Kemalism promoted a territorial definition of the Turkish nation.¹¹⁷ It was promulgated in the 1924 Constitution of the Republic, “The People of Turkey, regardless of religion and race are Turks as regards citizenship”. In his speeches Atatürk declared, “The people of Turkey, who have established the Turkish state, are called the

¹¹² David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism 1876-1908* (Frank Cass, 1977), 7-8.

¹¹³ Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism in Turkey: A Study in Irredentism* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1981), 176.

¹¹⁴ Günay Göksu Özdoğan, *Turan'dan Bozkurt'a: Tek Parti döneminde Türkçülük (1931-1946)*, (İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 50-51. Günay Göksu Özdoğan, “Dünyada ve Türkiye’de Turancılık”, in Mehmet Ö. Alkan (ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce, cilt 4, Milliyetçilik*, (İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 389.

¹¹⁵ Alaeddin Şenel, *İrk ve İrkçilik* (Bilim ve Sanat Yayınları, 1993), 88.

¹¹⁶ Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey Who is a Turk*, Routledge, 2006, 159.

¹¹⁷ Soner Cagaptay, “Reconfiguring the Turkish Nation in the 1930s”, in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 8.2, (2002), 68.

Turkish nation”. He stressed a shared past, interests, and the desire to live together as the common denominators of the nation.¹¹⁸

As regards the religious definition of Turkishness, Cagaptay elucidates it in the example of non-Turkish Muslim immigrants. In the 1920s and 1930s, non-Turkish Muslim and Turkish immigrants came to Turkey from Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia, as well as the Balkans, the Near East and the Caucasus. In the 1920s, the government did not require Turkishness as a prerequisite for citizenship. Turkey recognized Islam as a criterion in accepting these immigrants, and moreover, being an Ottoman Muslim was alone sufficient to become a citizen.¹¹⁹ This was especially the case with the non-Turkish Balkan Muslims. Since Turkey was depopulated and devastated in the 1920s, Ankara needed the human capital of these people.¹²⁰ The author further develops the idea that even though secularism was the cornerstone of Kemalism, “nominal Islamic identity as well as the cultural heritage of the former Muslim *millet* became important in defining Turkishness”, which viewed the countries’ Muslims as Turks; therefore, “Islam was a subtle but definitive marker of Turkishness in the 1920s.”¹²¹

Cagaptay’s argument is that it was during the High Kemalist years of the 1930s, which he entitles “Kemalism par excellence”, that the ethnic nationalism grew into Turkey’s official ideology.¹²² According to Cagaptay, the “Turkish History Thesis”, which emerged between 1930 and 1931, demonstrated the official view of what constituted Turkishness. First of all, race, ethnicity, and a long glorious history were the tripods of Turkishness; second, only people who spoke Turkish would be eligible for membership in the nation; and third, religion was ejected in defining Turkishness. The author contends that “ethnicity-through-language” and “race” became the main markers of Turkishness. He supports this by pointing out that in the Turkish History Thesis it was claimed that since emigration from Central Asia, the Turks had intersected with other races; however, the only thing that preserved their memories, cultural characteristics, the “Turkish intellect”, and made them a nation, was the Turkish language, thus making the Turkish language a prerequisite to become a Turk. As there

¹¹⁸ Soner Cagaptay, “Reconfiguring the Turkish Nation,” 68.

¹¹⁹ Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism*, 78

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 84.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 156.

¹²² *Ibid*, 68.

was no mention of Islam and preference was given to a secular national identity, Kemalism offered ethnic Turkishness as an alternative identity to Muslims. This meant that the Kemalists were ready to accept non-Turkish Muslims given that they adopted Turkish. They demanded complete assimilation from them.¹²³ In the practices of 1930s' Kemalism, race usually referred not to a biological community but to a national one. In the Kemalist mind, this was an unchangeable category; still, it was defined through language and not by biological factors.¹²⁴ On the other hand, Cagaptay affirms that Islam's central role in shaping the Turkish nation compromised the notion of race, which led to the ethno-religious definition of Turkishness. In this context he explains the reason why in the Kemalist thinking non-Turkish Muslims were seen as assimilable, if they learned Turkish notwithstanding the emphasis on ethnicity and race.¹²⁵

Günay Göksu Özdoğan demonstrated “the dilemma of the Kemalist nationalism”, which was the major challenge encountered by Kemalists. The Kemalists wanted to create an identity based on the synthesis of the ethnic and territorial models of nationalism. She thinks that the dilemma is in the fact that if the Kemalists stressed only ethnicity, Kurds, Circassians, Laz, and other Muslim immigrants would be excluded. On the other hand, ethnicity would provide a secular identity, which was a cornerstone of Kemalist nationalism; it would remove Islamic identity. If the identity was based on race, it would bring Pan-Turkism to the agenda, which was unacceptable for Kemalist foreign policy preferences at that point. The borders of Turkey were fixed according to *Misak-i Milli*, and the treaties signed between Turkey and the Soviet Union in 1925 prohibited the Pan-Turkist political aspirations. There was another deadlock in Kemalist nationalism. The territorial basis of the Republic was Anatolia, yet Anatolia was identified with the Seljukid and Ottoman periods that correlated to Islamic roots. According to Kemalism, the old Ottoman/Islamic identity was incompatible with the republican and secular identity. Özdoğan argues that in order to overcome this stalemate, they found the solution in the rewriting of history and creation of a new identity, which culminated in the Turkish History Thesis.¹²⁶

Hugh Poulton's work has also addressed this issue. He argues that Kemalist nationalism displays strong elements of the ethnic and territorial models. At first, Islam

¹²³ Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism*, 52.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 63.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 157.

¹²⁶ Günay Göksu Özdoğan, *Turan'dan Bozkurt'a*, 82-84.

was exploited in the Independence struggle, and the Muslim population of Anatolia was defined as the new Turks; however, as soon as the war was won, the role of Islam as a crucial component of Turkish nationalism was downplayed.¹²⁷ What makes the Turkish nation, according to Kemal, is “Political unity, linguistic unity, territorial unity, unity of lineage and roots, shared history and shared morality.”¹²⁸ Secularism and a great emphasis on pre-Islamic history through the Turkish History Thesis came to replace Islamic identity. Furthermore, through the Sun Language theory the purification of the language was stressed to make it more Turkish. While Poulton sees this as equating to the German model of ethnic nationalism with its chauvinism and stress on the purification and superiority of the given language, the author maintains that it continued to display strong elements of the territorial model as well, since it did not accept any form of irredentism and refused to recognize minorities within the state, in practice entailing assimilation.¹²⁹ According to Poulton, aggressive Kemalist Turkish nationalism also affected non-Turkish Muslim groups. People of Laz, Circassian, Slav, Albanian, or Georgian descent, were actively discouraged from using their mother tongue in public, especially during the *Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş* (Citizen, Speak Turkish) campaign. He cites leading RPP member Recep Peker's speech in 1931, “ We consider as ours those of our fellow citizens who live among us, who politically and socially belong to the Turkish nation and who have been inculcated with ideas of sentiments like ‘Kurdism’, ‘Circassianism’ and even ‘Lazism’ and ‘Pomakism’. We consider it as our duty to end, by sincere efforts these false conceptions inherited from the absolutist regime.” The author assessed this statement as a symbol of the territorial model of nationalism, as all citizens within the territory of the Turkish state are, or are to become, Turks.¹³⁰

Ayhan Aktar and Taha Parla argue that Kemalism broke away from Ziya Gökalp's ideology. Gökalp emphasized religion, ethics, aesthetics, and socialization as the criteria of the nation, while the Kemalists used ethnicity as the underlying factor of Turkishness. “The Kemalist conception of nationalism that defined the criterium of membership in the Turkish national community or in the Turkish nation as “being part of the Turkish ethnic group” was very different from the “Ottoman Nationalism” of the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II and from the conception of “cultural nationalism”

¹²⁷ Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent*, (Hurst & Company, London, 1997), 128.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 100.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 128.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 122.

formulated by Ziya Gökalp.”¹³¹ According to Aktar, Gökalp’s concept of “culture” is more encompassing than exclusionary. It placed individuals under the same broad cultural umbrella, irrespective of their ethnic identities as long as they shared the same mother tongue and socialization.¹³² Taha Parla analyses the texts of Mustafa Kemal’s speeches produced in the 1920s and 1930s and shows how nationalism deviated from “one face”, which is a defensive, egalitarian, ethnically pluralistic, and cultural conception of nationalism, and obtained a “second face”, which is more racial-ethnic.¹³³ However, what Aktar and Parla argue about the ethnic-based exclusionary nationalism refers to non-Muslim minorities. According to Aktar, every person living in Turkey was declared to be a Turk, and the social groups who could not be Turkified for structural reasons were discriminated against.¹³⁴

Kirişçi argues that as the modernist project, which aimed to construct a homogeneous state, became more difficult, “the government increasingly resorted to policies that emphasized a preference for Turkish ethnicity and language. The initial civic or territorial conceptualization of Turkish national identity and citizenship eroded.”¹³⁵

A similar argument is presented by Eric Jan Zürcher. He states that the Kemalist concept of nationality was firmly based on language, culture, and common purpose (“ideal”) by quoting the definition of “Turk” written in the secondary school history text *Tarih*. “Any individual within the Republic of Turkey whatever his faith, who speaks Turkish, grows up with Turkish culture and adopts the Turkish ideal, is a Turk”.¹³⁶ Zürcher further elaborates the concept “culture” and argues that Kemalist nationalism was based on an organic view of “Turkish culture”, not on a voluntarist or legalist concept of nationality. He supports his argument by analyzing one of the Kemalist ideologues Tekin Alp's (Moise Cohen) ideas on “culture”. Tekin Alp differentiates between the culture and civilization that was conceptualized by Ziya Gökalp. He thinks

¹³¹ Ayhan Aktar, “Turkification” Policies in the Early Republican Era”, (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009) , 48-49

¹³² Ibid, 31.

¹³³ Taha Parla, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Kültürün Resmi Kaynakları: Kemalist Tek-Parti İdeolojisi ve CHPnin Altı Oku*, Cilt 3 (İstanbul; İletişim Yayınları, 1992), 176-221.

¹³⁴ Ayhan Aktar, 30.

¹³⁵ Kemal Kirişçi, “Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices”, in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.36, no 33, (2000),1.

¹³⁶ Eric Jan Zürcher, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists”, in Kemal Karpat (ed.) *Modern Turkey and Ottoman Past* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 176.

the culture, which consists of sentiments and attitudes, transfers genetically from one's parents, but civilization is the high culture that consciously can be learned during one's lifetime and be changed at will. Claiming that culture is "natural and biological", Tekin Alp considers it impossible to change. Eric Jan Zürcher concludes that culture is an exclusive category as much as race. Asking Kurds, Arabs, or Circassians to adopt Turkish culture is an impossible demand of which the ideologues of Kemalism were aware. As the adoption of Turkish culture was prerequisite to be a member of the Turkish nation, it could only exclude significant parts of the population within Turkey from full and equal membership in the nation and lead to a politics of assimilation.¹³⁷

Based on these wide ranging definitions, the following elements can be deduced about Kemalist nationalism. All the authors made a differentiation between what constituted the Turkish national identity in the 1920s and 1930s. It was argued that the territorial definition of Turkish national identity in the 1920s was replaced by ethnic nationalism in the 1930s. In the discussion of what ethnicity meant in Kemalist thinking, Cagaptay and Poulton argued that language was stressed as an underlying factor of Turkishness, whereas Zürcher emphasized "culture" as an exclusive and organic category along with the language. Another distinctive element of Kemalist nationalism was assimilation politics in regard to non-Turkish Muslims. Cagaptay argued that religion was an umbrella in viewing Muslims residing in the borders of Turkey as Turks and that learning the Turkish language would lead to assimilation. Poulton saw assimilation policies in refusing the recognition of non-Turkish Muslim minorities in the Turkish state and regarding them as Turks.

It can be pointed out that Rıza Nur also supports ethnic nationalism. However, in his picture, not language or culture, but race and blood are accepted as the markers of Turkishness. Moreover, culture is completely rejected in his definition of nation. Although in some places Nur mentions the importance of sharing the same religion, language, and mindset among the nation, his primary emphasis is blood and race. Hence, his nationalist ideology acquires a racist overtone. As was indicated earlier, this is demonstrated in his perception towards the minorities of Turkey, including non-Turkish Muslims. Labeling all the minorities as "alien elements", Rıza Nur does not

¹³⁷ Eric Jan Zürcher, 178-179.

accept non-Turkish Muslims as Turks. “Alien elements” are the people who do not carry Turkish blood, so they should be excluded.

The other key difference between Kemalist nationalism and that of Rıza Nur is that Rıza Nur advocated Pan-Turkism, whereas Turanism and Pan-Turkism were rejected as an official ideology by the Kemalist regime.

Nevertheless, it can be observed that the racist outlook was not completely exempt from the Kemalist regime. The Kemalist ruling elite stressed race through the Turkish History Thesis launched at the beginning of the 1930s. At this point, Kemalist and Rıza Nur’s nationalist ideologies converge since both of them highlight race. This issue will be further discussed in the third chapter of this study.

CHAPTER 2

DR. RIZA NUR AS A HISTORIAN: *TÜRK TARİHİ (TURKISH HISTORY)*

“The biggest pride that I feel in this world is that I am created as a Turk. I have read so many histories but have never seen such heroic, chivalrous, kindhearted, smart people as the Turks and a nation like the Turkish which has such a great and glorious history. I have observed so many nations, but have never seen such a nation that has the abilities necessary to rise up to the highest position in today’s civilized world. Turkishness is a quenchless and endless love for me. It lives in my heart and in my chest above any kind of love. ... Only it can keep me alive. I do not know how I can express my gratitude for being created as a Turk and with what kind of service I can compensate [for this]. I am writing this work with the hope that I can pay the debt of my heart a little bit.”¹³⁸

Dr. Rıza Nur begins the introduction of his 14-volume work *Turkish History* with the passage above, which elucidates the fact that although a doctor, not a professional historian, the author produces Turkish history out of his “endless love” and devotion towards Turkishness. He embarked on writing the work in Egypt in 1917 and finished it in Ankara in 1921. The twelve volumes of the work were published from 1924 to 1926 by the Ministry of Education (*Maarif Vekaleti*).¹³⁹

In his memoirs one can find a narrative of how he decided to start writing *Turkish History* as well as the aim of his work. While in exile in Egypt and hoping to return to Turkey, he writes:

“I will return to the homeland and work as a doctor. I did not want to get involved in politics, but I am thinking that serving for the health of people is like a drop in the ocean. This nation's sickness is actually political, cultural and scientific. The genuine service is this one. I had thought that the latter can be amateur and for pleasure and to work as a doctor to make a living. Before the Balkan wars I was against the nation coming into play. I was keeping it like a secret faith. The result of the Balkan wars removed my fears. Besides, the actions that Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians, Armenians and others did, agitated my Turkishness. I came to the conviction that the most crucial and urgent thing is to inform this nation about Turkishness, to

¹³⁸ Dr. Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, (Toker Yayınları, İstanbul, 1994), cilt 1-2, 11.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

educate them about the glorious victories of their ancestors and epics, and inculcate national identity to them. This is why I thought it is necessary to write *Turkish History*. I started to do research.”¹⁴⁰

The introduction of *Turkish History* provides a glimpse of the author’s ideas about Turkish history. He believes that in order for the nation to endure Turks should know itself and its history. He mentions that prior to his work no one had informed Turks about their history and this is a harmful deficiency. Turks think that their history starts from the Ottomans and are unaware beyond the Ottoman history. He specifies his aim in writing the book to provide “national education”, especially for the schools and the youth. This work is not for the scholars but for the people, since scholars can learn also from foreign sources. According to him, the translations of European works related to Turks are not useful, but rather harmful, since some of these works fabricate history or change a significant number of truths because of the writers’ antipathy towards Turks. He accepts that his own work is not perfect. A perfect and accurate Turkish history work can be produced only when all the works written about Turks in China and Europe, as well as those in other languages are translated and research is done by scholars traveling the Turkish homeland. Rıza Nur did research in the Caucasus and Russia, but alone this is not sufficient. However, he claims that for the time being this work is sufficient, useful and necessary, and it can become a basis for further studies and the writing of perfect works. He further elaborates that prior to his work there had been books written about Turks both in Europe and the East, but no one had collected and periodized Turkish history. Rather, it is Rıza Nur himself who has filled that deficiency.¹⁴¹

Nihal Atsız expressing his ideas about *Turkish History* acknowledges that it is not a historical scholarly work, and that in some places there are even arbitrary appropriations and mistakes; however, in reality Rıza Nur did not pursue a goal of producing a scholarly work. In Atsız’ words, this cannot reduce the value of the “great work” since its main point is to be narrated from the Turkist point of view and generate “the love towards Turkishness” among the readers.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, I, 429.

¹⁴¹ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 1-2, 11-12.

¹⁴² Nihal Atsız, “Rıza Nur'un Türkcülüğe En Büyük Hizmeti” in Ziya Yücel İlhan, *Sevenlerinin Kalemiyle Rıza Nur*, (İstanbul, B. Kervan Matbaası, 1962), 6.

2.1. Rıza Nur's Periodization of Turkish History

Rıza Nur creates his own periodization of Turkish history. He sees the acceptance of Islam as the turning point for Turkish history, and therefore divides Turkish history into two parts: “Old History” (*Eski Tarih*), which means the period before the acceptance of Islam by Turks, and “Modern History” (*Yeni Tarih*), which is the period after Turks accepted Islam. In the “overview” of the first chapter, in which he narrates every period generally, the author adds a third period and modifies the names: Old Turkish History (*Eski Türk Tarihi*), New Turkish History (*Yeni Türk Tarihi*), and Recent Turkish History (*Taze Türk Tarihi*). According to his comment, he did not categorize the history as Ancient Ages (*Eski Çağ*), Middle Ages (*Orta Çağ*), and Modern Era (*Yeni Çağ*) as this delineation fits more with European history. He explains that the history of Turks and Muslims is different; hence, it must have another periodization.¹⁴³

Rıza Nur titles the Old Turkish History as also the National Period or the Period of Traditions and Law (*Töre ve Yasa Dönemi*). Here Rıza Nur mostly discusses the Turkish states of the Eastern Turks: the *Hiyong-Nu* (Xiongnu) and *Tukyu* (*Göktürk Empire*).¹⁴⁴ By analyzing old Turkish inscriptions he comes to the conclusion that in the Period of Traditions and Law Turks loved their nation and Turkishness, and acted for the fame and glory of the nation. They were heroic. Turks did not give importance to religion, even to Shamanism, which was their national religion, because the “Law”, “Tradition”, the military system, the love towards homeland, discipline, dying for the nation and homeland, and chivalry were dominant and directing them, and were driving forces for them.¹⁴⁵

As for the Modern Turkish History, which he also named the Period of Religion or Islamic Period, Rıza Nur examines the Turks' role in Islamic civilization. He asserts that Turks accepted Islam, and they became the heroes of Islam. Until then, Turks had been the bridge between Europeans and the Chinese; after accepting Islam they

¹⁴³ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 1-2, 55-56.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 57.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 71-74.

confronted Europeans in the Crusades. They became the reason for the failures of the Crusades, and they hindered European invasions to Asia. In these wars were neither Iranians nor Arabs. Due to their heroism, Turks saved Islam and the Arabic culture from extermination. He further expounds that in Asia the most vigorous, active and talented nation is the Turkish nation. To learn the politics and history of Asia, one needs to learn about Turks. Huns, Avars, Genghis and the Ottomans successfully attacked Europe. Again, Turks stopped the raids of Europeans. “Even now, if we did not have the “Anatolian Independence War”, everything would be vanished in Asia. Now the Turk is the only representative and defender of “Muslim Asia” against “Christian Europe”. Before he was the head of Asia; now he had become that of the Islamic world”.¹⁴⁶ In this period Rıza Nur splits three kinds of hegemony in the Turkic world: Eastern, Mongol, or Genghis hegemony; Centre, Central Asian, or Timur hegemony; and Western, Turkey, or Oghuz hegemony.¹⁴⁷

In the Recent Turkish History period (the Rebirth and Awakening or the Second National Period) Rıza Nur discusses the Ottoman Constitutional Period, the Independence War, and the awakening of Turks in Russia.¹⁴⁸

Apart from this general overview, all the volumes of *Turkish History* cover the states established by the Turks in greater detail. He splits Turkish states into two: Main Homeland Turkish States and Turkish States Outside the Homeland, the latter including Turkish states in China (Turkish dynasties), Egypt, India, and other places.¹⁴⁹

Rıza Nur considers Turan to be the homeland of the Turks. He is of the opinion that the Turkish homeland is very large and that there is no other nation in the world that possesses such a tremendous homeland. The geographical description is as follows: The northern border is the North Sea; the eastern one is the Sea of Japan. The southern border starts with a line that passes 200 km from Beijing; separates Tibet into north and south; continues to the south of Karakorum and Pamir, and from the Himalayas to the lower boundary of northern Afghanistan; passes from the south of Khorasan, Mount Elbrus, and the south of Tehran and Azerbaijan, and through Bagdad to the Mediterranean Sea and Aegean Sea. The western border starts from Thessalonica, the

¹⁴⁶ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 1-2, 75-76.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

Vardar River, Morava, and Tuna, and stretches to the western border of Hungary and then to the north, between Moscow and Kazan. Continuing to the west of Finland and the Baltic Sea, and finally from the east of Sweden and Norway to the North Sea.¹⁵⁰

Rıza Nur states that the most important Turkish states are the Oghuz Empire; the Turkish states in India; the *Hiyong-nu*, *Tukyu* empires, the Scythe Empire; the Elam, Sumer, and Akkad in Iraq; the Hittite state in Anatolia; the Hazar state in the Caucasus; the Kumyk, Urartu, and Median states in the Caucasus and Anatolia, the Cuman state in Thrace; the Hun and Avar empires; and the Peruvian state in America. He points out that there are no sources and very little information regarding these states and that there are still unclarified doubts about whether some of these are Turkish or not. However, there is a good deal of information about the *Hiyong-Nu* and *Tukyu* in Chinese sources, so they are conclusively Turkish.¹⁵¹

2.2. The Aim of *Turkish History*

By examining all the volumes of the work one can imply that Rıza Nur's goal, on the one hand, is to demonstrate the role of the Turks in the establishment of civilizations, which can be well summarized in the following excerpt.

“In India and Transoxania Turks were the ones who established old civilizations, revived and enlarged civilizations, and were a link between civilizations. The whole world should put crowns of honor and glory on the Turks' heads. They also influenced Chinese civilization. In Iraq, Anatolia and Mesopotamia the first civilizations were built by our ancestors. Over the course of the Muslim period in Central Asia we founded another civilization; the civilization that is wrongly called “*Asar-i Arabiye*” in Egypt was brought into existence by us. We brought civilization to Anatolia in the Islamic period. Those who call Turks only warriors, what will they say about this? Turks! You are such a lucky nation. It is your right to be praised”.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 1-2, 15-16.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 175.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 243.

On the other hand, Rıza Nur expresses dissatisfaction with the fact that the world, particularly Europeans, considers Turks uncivilized and barbaric, so he aims to change the perception of Europeans about Turks and to show the impact that Turks had on the rise of civilizations. For instance, talking about the literature of Uyghurs *Kutadgu Bilig*, he claims, “I do not know why the ones who admire Greeks do not appreciate this art? Arabs also did not create such works, but why the people who elevate Arabic civilization, consider us not to have civilization and literature? The reason is that we have always been remote from Europe; they did not recognize us, and during the Crusades they fought against Turks. They are averse to Turks because the Ottomans conquered half of Europe and all the books of Turks are written in Arabic and Persian”.

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On another occasion, Rıza Nur argues that Europeans consider all other nations inferior. They call almost every nation barbarian. When they write history and find a civilized nation, they immediately offer evidence to make them from the “Aryan” race. He thinks gradually they will be cured from this disease as, for example, they called the Japanese barbarians in the 19th century. Later Europeans regarded the Japanese as civilized. He states that the reason is not because Japan has become advanced but because Europeans claim that in the past Japan had a civilization and art. He is upset that Europeans call Turks barbarians as well. Nevertheless, he is convinced that one day they will improve their mistakes, but, in his words, Turks need to make efforts to introduce themselves to Europeans.¹⁵⁴

“Turks who created wonders both in military and civilization terms in China, India, Egypt and Europe entered every corner of the world, established their hegemony, and created significant examples of civilization, and the glorious traces have not been erased at present. This nation is the most selected nation of creation. Their [Turks] presence with its characteristics encompasses the whole world. No one has ever rejected their superiority in military affairs, but it is wrong to say that Turks do not have works in civilization”.¹⁵⁵

In his study, Rıza Nur sets a goal of correcting the historical mistakes made by European historians and revealing the “truths” about the Turks. This is the main reason he writes, for example, the histories of Iran and Egypt, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

¹⁵³ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 1-2, 446.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, cilt 5-6, 262.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, cilt 7-8, 104.

At the same time, Rıza Nur criticizes Europe's colonization politics. He thinks that with the advancement of European civilization, oppression, killing and plundering increased. By capturing countries Europe wants to make the Turkish homeland a farm and to force Turks to work as slaves. In his interpretation, it is natural since in the world the powerful always suppress the weak. It is the law of nature that "a big fish eats the small fish". The powerless are subject to annihilation. He considers the microbe that leads to the weakness in the societies to be ignorance. This is why Europeans succeeded. He underlines that Europe was also the enemy of Muslims. Europeans never forgot the old struggle between Christians and Muslims; they wanted to take revenge for the Crusades. He spells out that Europeans used two masks to implement colonization politics: civilizing and serving humanity. They justified their conquests by claiming to civilize states.¹⁵⁶ However, they did not bring civilization and instead obliterated the peculiarities of the Turkish nation. Rıza Nur is frustrated by the fact that Turks did not understand this; they were deceived by the sweet false words of Europeans and fascinated by them. His conviction is that Turks could not withstand European invasion because of their ignorance, innocence, and laziness. He regards this as the biggest failure of the Ottoman Turks. He criticizes how instead of gathering all the Turks under one flag and preserving Turkish culture, the Ottomans, on one hand, "pursued mirage in the deserts of Africa like thirsty tigers", while on the other hand, "as wandering rams struck their heads on the castles of Vienna." This implies that Rıza Nur criticizes Ottoman imperialism and advocates Pan-Turkism. He also disapproves that the Ottomans valued the Arabic and Persian languages instead of Turkish, which in his view caused poverty, wretchedness and ignorance to pervade the nation.¹⁵⁷

2.3. Turks in Ancient Times and Turkish Migrations

The question of how Turks migrated in ancient times can be found in *Turkish History*. Rıza Nur describes that Turks have existed since the darkest times of history. He makes reference to the "disdainful" Chinese, who said that Turks were an old nation similar to the Chinese. In ancient times they were spread from the north of China to the

¹⁵⁶ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 1-2, 110.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 110.

Caspian Sea. He refers to the arguments of some historians that claim that this old and big nation, the Turanian race, emerged in Altay, and first the Medians came to the north of today's Iran. Afterwards Turks moved to China, India, Iran, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, today's Russia, and Central Europe. The migration of Turks from the east to the west occurred via two routes. One is the northern route, which headed to Europe from the *Kapçak* and *Kuzgun* seas. The other route is southern, from the south of the *Kuzgun* sea splitting into two, one passing the Caucasus going north, the other spreading into Iran, Mesopotamia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Anatolia.¹⁵⁸

Having migrated to China they created different imperial dynasties; for example, the Hiya dynasty was ruling the country in 2205 BC. Turks established dominance in India as well.

The Medians were the first nation of today's Iran, they were dominant from the Caspian Sea to today's Iraq, Fars, and Persian Gulf. They created the first cuneiform writing. Iranians assimilated and eliminated them. Persian civilization was built upon Median civilization. Rıza Nur draws the conclusion that the foundation of the Persian civilization is Turkish civilization, and today the territory called Iran is one of the Turkish homelands, part of Turan.

Turks that moved to Anatolia established the Moskay, Sapir, Kolhida, Halip, and Tubal states in the Black Sea region, and in the south the Hittite, Cuman, and Kумыk states. He states that this shows that Anatolia has been the Turkish homeland since ancient times. The ones that went to Iraq are Elam and Sumerians. They also created states and civilizations there. Elam was in Kurdistan, and the Sumerians were in *Elcezire*. The Assyrians annihilated Elam. There were cities named Ur and Uruk; these are Turkish words, Ur meaning 'ditch' and Uruk meaning 'tribe'.¹⁵⁹

Finns, Eskimos, Lapps, and Estonians spread into the north in the Arctic Sea area. Finns established a great state in their new homeland. Scythians dominated the Black Sea Region. Their state lasted for 7 centuries and was destroyed by the Sarmatians.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 1-2, 57-58.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 1-2, 57-58.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

2.4. The Origins of Civilizations

2.4.1. Anatolia and Mesopotamia

Rıza Nur's position about the Hittite state and Sumer, Akkad, and Elam is controversial. On the one hand, he asserts that there are no sources or very little information regarding these states or that there are still unclarified doubts about whether they are Turkish or not,¹⁶¹ and they cannot be a source for Turkish history.¹⁶² This is why there is no chapter in *Turkish History* devoted to these states.

Rıza Nur is skeptical in regard to the Turkishness of the Hittite, Sumerian, Akkadian, and Elamite states, yet he is also inconsistent in his ideas. In some passages of the book, Rıza Nur proclaims that they are Turkish states. For instance, talking about the rights of Turks over Anatolia, he states that Turks did not migrate to these territories only 9 or 12 centuries ago and refers to De Morgan and other experts who argue that the local population of these territories were Turanians by 4000 BC. There existed such Turanian states and nations, as Urartu, Elam, Sumer, Tubal, Hittite, Cuman, and Kumyk.¹⁶³

Discussing the origins of China, Rıza Nur argues that there is a huge similarity between Archaic Chinese civilization and the Turanian Sumer civilization of Iraq. Making reference to "Anev" explorations, which showed that in Turkestan there existed a civilization from 5000 to 2000 BC, he concludes that both the Chinese and Sumerians migrated from Turkestan and brought the old civilization of the Turks to China and Iraq, respectively.¹⁶⁴ Elaborating on the origins of Iran, he asserts that "The Sumer and Elam Turkish states prevailed in southwestern Iran in ancient times".¹⁶⁵

Having claimed that the creator of the Abbasid state were Turks and that the Islamic civilization later was built in Bagdad is indebted to the Turks for its existence, Rıza Nur states that the Abbasid state cannot be referred to as Arabic state since all the soldiers, and officials were Turks and, the population was also from the Turanian race.

¹⁶¹ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 1-2, 175.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 55.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, cilt 3-4, 10-11.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, cilt 5-6, 182.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 165.

He again reminds the reader that the first population in Iraq in the south, Akkadians, and in the north, Sumerians, were Turanians.¹⁶⁶

Rıza Nur considers a number of civilizations to have originated from the Turks, such as Iran, India, and China.

2.4.2. Iran

Rıza Nur insists that the mother of Iranian civilization is Turanian civilization. The oldest state in Iran is Media; the Medians were Turks. They resided in the northern and northeastern parts of Iran. It was a Turkish civilization that lasted for 4 centuries. European authors also mention that the Median civilization was the base of Iranian civilization.¹⁶⁷

Dr. Rıza Nur not only claims that the foundation of Iran is Turanian civilization but also narrates the history of Iran, as he thinks that the works that randomly touch on Turks and Turkish history are inaccurate, especially when it comes to Iran and Iranian civilization. He writes the history of Iran chronologically to demonstrate the Turks' role in the politics and civilization of Iran. According to him, Iranian history is studied in the wrong way; European scholars have the wrong perception of history. He criticizes that European scholars always looked down on Turks and admired Iranian civilization, and he emphasizes that when one studies the history of Iran, one can see the enormous trace the Turks left on Iran. He thinks it became fashionable to degrade Turks and that this is why historians could not see certain historical truths and did not want to see them. Rıza Nur writes the history with the intention to correct such historical mistakes and reveal truths. He argues that in Iranian history, Turkish and Persian dynasties and states followed one another, and that, there is no such Iran that the nation, dynasty and state belonged only to Persians. Before starting this study, he also had the same mistaken perception, but afterwards his ideas changed.¹⁶⁸ Rıza Nur compares the number of years that Turkish states ruled in Iran to the number that Persian states did and finds that the Turks ruled more than the Persians. The Turkish dominance counts

¹⁶⁶ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 1-2, 87.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 52.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, cilt 5-6, 50-51.

1504 years, except for the Medians, which is unclear, whereas the reign of dynasties of Persian origins make 694 years. He thinks this comparison demonstrates the historical right of Turks over Iran and the Turkishness of Iran.¹⁶⁹

Rıza Nur questions whether Iranian civilization and literature admired by Europeans is Persian or not. He says if he had time, he would spend a few years of his life studying this issue, and he thinks it would be a big discovery worldwide. He offers a few pieces of evidence to prove his ideas. First, the Persians must be grateful to the Turks, as the Arabs had made Arabic the language of Iran after the conquest, but when the Seljukids came, Alp Arslan made Persian the official language. Otherwise, the Persians would forget their language. “We Turks are very weird. If you remove Persian why do you not put Turkish instead!”¹⁷⁰ Second, he argues that Persian literature, art, architectural monuments, famous poets, and scientists all appeared during the period when Turkish dynasties ruled. Turkish rulers sponsored and nurtured poets like Revdeki, Ferdowsi, Hafez, and Omar Khayyam. He also questions whether these poets are of Persian descent or Turkish. In his judgment, the fact that they wrote in Persian is inconclusive since, for instance, in France most of the writers wrote in Latin, but it is not considered that the works belong to the Latin nation. He thinks that they are more likely to be Turkish as most of them were born in Khorasan, which is a part of the Turkish homeland. He urges that this topic should be studied further to show that this literature known as Persian is shown to be Turkish.¹⁷¹

2.4.3. India

Rıza Nur underlines that Indian civilization was grounded by Turanian people. The old people of India are the Negritos and the Dravidians in Deccan. After them, the Aryans come to Sindh Ganges. According to the recent research, the Dravidians are from the Turanian race and have kinship with the Sumerians in Iraq.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 5-6, 165-166.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 167.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 168-169.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 252-253.

Apart from this, he is highly critical of European historians who attempt to claim the dynasties in India as Aryan. He pinpoints that Turks created sultanates in India as well, but that European historians do not provide any information about this.¹⁷³ He estimated the rule of different Turanian people over India at 2747 years, which is more than the rule of people of other origins.¹⁷⁴

2.4.4. China

Similar evidence finds its place in the chapter on Chinese history and about the origins of Chinese civilization. Most scientists say that the Chinese came from Siberia, Ural or most probably Kashgar and at the beginning they settled in Kansu principality and then moved to the east. There is a big similarity between Archaic Chinese civilization and the Turanian Sumer civilization of Iraq. “Anev” explorations showed that in Turkestan there existed a civilization from 5000 to 2000 BC. Both the Chinese and the Sumerians migrated from Turkestan and brought the old civilization of the Turks to China and Iraq, respectively.¹⁷⁵

Rıza Nur states that in different times Turkish dynasties founded empires in China with various Chinese or other names. Northern China was always dominated by Turks, and even when it was ruled by a Chinese dynasty, Turks were hired as soldiers. According to him, it would be even better to consider Northern Chinese states and dynasties as Turanian. He mentions that to prove this there are not sufficient historical sources, yet he believes that his study will offer a good deal of evidence to demonstrate the Turkishness of Northern Chinese states and dynasties.¹⁷⁶

2.5. History of Egypt

An enormous part of *Turkish History*, volumes- 8, 9, 10, 11, and a part of the 12th volume, are dedicated to Egyptian history.

¹⁷³ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 5-6, 267.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, cilt 7-8, 186.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, cilt 5-6, 182

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 207-208.

In fact, Rıza Nur started *Turkish History* with the history of Egypt. In the introduction to Egyptian history, which he wrote in Cairo in 1918, one can find the reason why he narrated the history of Egypt. His purpose is to teach Turks about their historical past and their civilization in Egypt, to shed light on Turkish personages who have been neglected in the pages of history, and to demonstrate the rights of Turks that have been taken away by Arabs.¹⁷⁷ He expresses astonishment that Arabs still reign over Egypt and that all the Turkish buildings and works are called “*asar-ı arabiyeye*” (Arabic works). This perceived unfairness strongly affects him. He looks at this attribution and feels sorry for Turks. This is why he decided to embark on writing this work aiming both to correct the mistakes of Egyptians and Europeans and to describe the prerogative of the Turkish nation, which is unaware of its rights, and to demonstrate the big right of Turan.

“I have to admit with great sorrow that after becoming Muslims we Turks forgot our nation and wholeheartedly got stuck to Arabs and their language, and instead of serving our nation, our homeland, and language, we contributed to the longevity of the Arabs, their culture, and language. If not for us, today the Arabs and their religion and language would be vanished. Now we are paying for these mistakes. In response to our kindness, we receive ingratitude and damage from Arabs. Now we are in such a period that we need to devote ourselves to our nation and language.”¹⁷⁸

He assures that he added only his comments and thoughts and did not make any changes to the events of Egyptian history. “There is no need to falsify the history of the Turks. The ancestors of the Turks are the creators of the great events of history; they are examples of heroism, manliness, chivalry, generosity, humane attitude, and sublime heart.”¹⁷⁹

According to Rıza Nur, Egyptian history written in Arabic and European languages had the wrong periodization. Therefore, he corrected it and he is the first to create a Turanian period in it. He devoted one chapter to the period of the Pharaohs and to the period encompassing from Alexander to Islam (641 AD), which he splits into periods of Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines, and Persians. Then he describes the

¹⁷⁷ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 7-8, 206.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 205.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 206.

Islamic period, which in turn is divided into Arabic and Turanian periods. The enormous attention in the work is paid to the latter period, which covers three volumes of *Turkish History*.¹⁸⁰

Rıza Nur criticizes European scholars who call the monuments in Egypt “Muslim art”. It is a wrong perception as it includes the Turkish, Persian, Arabic nations as a collective Muslim. Europeans do not call European art Christian art; rather, they say French art and culture or German art and culture. Rıza Nur urges that Europeans should improve their mistakes and specify the nationality that created the monuments. In his words, the worst mistake is that they name this civilization and art “Arabic civilization and art”. He stresses that neither their architects, nor their masters and constructors are Arabs. In Egypt there are two types of monuments. The first one represents the period of the Pharaohs with pyramids and hieroglyphs; the second one represents the Muslim period with mosques, minarets, tombs, medrese, and tablets/*kitabe*. Arabs in their two and half century reign did not create anything; all these monuments were created in the Turanian era.¹⁸¹ First, he indicates that Arabic civilization appeared in Abbasid times and that until then nothing like Arabic art existed. The period when Arabs dominated Egypt coincides with the period before the Abbasids. Second, Rıza Nur offers evidence that he believes proves that all the monuments were produced when Turkish sultans ruled.¹⁸² Emphasizing that Turkish architecture in Egypt was created also in the period of the Mamluks, who were so powerful in science, military, and art that Europeans learned from them and transferred their knowledge to Europe.¹⁸³

Rıza Nur considers another innovation and correction that he made in Egyptian history is that people called the Hyksos, who conquered Egypt around BCE 1657 and contributed to the development of civilization in Egypt, spreading science and education, descend from Oguz Han's generation, unlike some authors who consider them to be bedouin tribes that originated from the mixture of Arabs and Syrians or Phoenicians, or others who claim them to be Arab, Palestinian, or Hebrew. He supports this by showing that the Egyptians learned warfare techniques from the Hyksos, who introduced horses to Egyptians. He thinks that the possibility is that they are Turks because at those times the Turks were masters of warfare techniques, and the most

¹⁸⁰ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 7-8, 210.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, cilt 11-12, 290.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 306.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 169-170.

precious things for them were horses and weapons. Therefore, the Hyksos came from Asia not Arabia. Some call them Hitav (Hittite), which is a Turanian nation residing in the north of Syria. Then he shows how linguistically, the word “Hyksos” originates from the word “Oguz”.¹⁸⁴

2.6. Rıza Nur’s Ideas about the Mongols

Another argument that is highlighted by the author is related to the Mongols. He criticizes the tendency in Turkey to describe the Mongols as a separate race, assuming that this tendency might derive from the fact that Europeans consider the Mongols as a lower race or that it is accepted in western history textbooks that Genghis Khan is a tyrant. Rıza Nur thinks the Mongols are from the Turanian race; therefore, Genghis’ empire is not a Mongol Empire, but a Turkish empire. He makes a clarification that there is no Mongol race, and it was a mistake of old historians of Europe to use the expression “Mongali race”. He offers a few arguments to support this, such as that according to Turkish genealogy and folktales, Mongol was one of the sons of Turk and Oghuz Khan descends from Mongol Khan. The Bozkurt pedigree makes Turk and Mongol father and son. This is the reason that Europeans call this empire the Turkish Mongolian Empire. Among other evidence is: Mongolian features changed after the Mongols merged with the Chinese. The Mongolian language shares a great number of common words with Turkish. Three fourths of Genghis Khan's army was composed of Turks; the generals, officials, commanders were Turks; and the rules and legislation were Turkish. The official language of the state was not Mongolian, but Uyghur. Genghis was not from the Mongol nation, but from Kerait. Keraites were pure Turks, and their language was pure Turkish.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 11-12, 237-239.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, cilt 1-2, 255-258.

2.7. Turks in America

Rıza Nur claims that the ancient and autochthon population of America are Turanians. He takes the lead from the article in Encyclopedia Britannica (1922) which stated that the autochthon population of America were proto-Mongols who moved to America from the Yenisei River through the Bering Strait. Rıza Nur asserts that those people must have been Turanians as the Yenisei River is located in the Turkish homeland. Turanians lived in Mexico and Peru. When the Spanish arrived in Mexico in the 16th century, they did not find barbarians, but they encountered civilized people who had advanced agriculture, architecture and monuments. Turks created a state there and developed a brilliant civilization. The Spanish found that the people used the Turkish calendar there.¹⁸⁶ He thinks that the anthropologic research affirms this idea, since the western part of Northern America is populated by brachycephalic people. He makes reference to the research done in Siberia by the American anthropologist Herdlicka, who found commonalities between the inhabitants of the Yenisei River and American locals.¹⁸⁷

Rıza Nur further makes an argument that there are two eras of Turkish existence in America: apart from the ancient era, there is also a modern Turanian era. In his claim, America was discovered by Turanians long before Christopher Columbus. After the conquest of southern China, Kubilay Khan sent fleets for the seizure of Java and other islands. It is possible that the fleets reached Panama from East Asia and then spread over Mexico and Peru. A number of geographical names in Mexico and Peru are similar to Turkish words, which further proves that Turks inhabited America. Since American and European scholars do not know Turkish, they could not make adequate explanations. In his opinion, Turks should go to America and do research in this topic.

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¹⁸⁶ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 11-12, 336-337.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 339.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 338-339.

2.8. Rıza Nur about the Seljukids and Ottomans

In the memoirs Dr. Rıza Nur reports that alongside with the periodization of Turkish history in his work and for the first time making the terms Turkish, it was him to put forward the theory for the first time that the Seljukid and Ottoman states were not separate states, but were dynasties of the same state -Turkey. Moreover, he complains how Fuad Köprülüzade attributed this finding to himself.¹⁸⁹ Rıza Nur's idea was later internalized by a young generation of Turkists, Nihal Atsız and Reha Oğuz Türkan. They repeated his idea that the Turkish state started in the 11th century with the Seljukid dynasty, but the "history of our nation and race is 25 centuries"; the state was established not as a result of the battle of Malazgirt in 1071, but in Khorasan in 1040 when the Seljukids achieved victory over the Ghaznavid Empire. They argued that the history of Turkey should be accepted as the history of a nation-state.¹⁹⁰

In *Turkish History* Rıza Nur provides a detailed account of this innovation. He narrates that he read in one of the books that as the last ruler of the Seljukid state did not have an heir to the throne, he bequeathed that Osman Gazi inherits the throne. At that time a thought came to Rıza Nur's mind that the throne of the Ottomans is the Seljukid throne, and the reign had passed from one dynasty to another, and not by force, but rather in a legal way. This brought him to the conclusion that the state is the same. It is wrong to say that there is a Seljukid state and an Ottoman state. He claims that prior to his finding historians had inaccurately divided this state into two states and considered the two dynasties to be separate states.¹⁹¹

To justify this, Rıza Nur provides different arguments. For instance, he states that if the territory and nation are the same, the state is one. Both for the Ottomans and Seljukids, Anatolia is that territory. The Seljuk dynasty started its state in the east and the key center was in Central Asia, Iran and Mesopotamia, and in its last period the

¹⁸⁹ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatiratım*, III, 337-338.

¹⁹⁰ Güven Bakırezer, "Nihal Atsız" in Mehmet Ö. Alkan (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, (İletişim Yayınları, 2002, Vol.4), 357. Nizam Önen, "Reha Oğuz Türkan", *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce*, (İletişim Yayınları, 2002, Vol.4), 365.

¹⁹¹ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 3-4 , 9.

center moved to Anatolia. During the Ottoman period the state started in Anatolia, then the center moved to Rumelia, in its last period the center again was Anatolia. He derives from this fact that the main body and roots of this state are in Anatolia. When it added a “right wing” or “pseudopod” in its right or left, after some period they lost this change and only its main body remained. This means that Anatolia is the natural and permanent place of this state; the Anatolian territory gives life to it.

As for the nation, Rıza Nur argues that even before the establishment of the Seljukid state during the period of the Abbasid Caliphate, Turks settled in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Adana. The next wave of settlement happened together with the Seljuks; Turks became the main population of these countries and Turkified these places. Since the 9th century these places had been inhabited completely by Turks. In the period of the Ottomans a new nation had not emerged. This does not mean that Turks migrated to these territories only 9 or 12 centuries ago. He refers to De Morgan and other experts who say that the local population of these territories were Turanians by 4000 BC. There existed such Turanian states and nations as Urartu, Elam, Sumer, Tubal, Hittite, Cuman, and Kumyk. These Turks fell under the influence of different states and nations and changed culturally and in religious and linguistic terms. The Seljuks found them under the influence of Christian and Byzantine culture.¹⁹² Rıza Nur draws similarities between France and Turkey. In France, the Bourbon and Orleans dynasties changed, but the state remained France. Similarly, the Seljukid and Ottoman names come from the names of the founders of the dynasties.¹⁹³

In the first months of the Mudros Armistice Rıza Nur published an article in the *Akşam* newspaper, in which against the claims of Armenians and Greeks towards Anatolia, he argued that the state based in Anatolia is not the Ottoman state, but Turkey, and it has a 9 centuries of political existence. He also made a speech in the *Meclis* of Istanbul. Some people objected, but he thinks that from a scholarly perspective, this cannot be objected to since in case of accepting the Seljuks and Ottomans as separate states, the Republic should also be accepted as a separate state. Within 5 years, his theory gained value, and in Turkish society it has been regarded as a natural thing.

¹⁹² Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 3-4, 10-11.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 12.

He goes on to explain that the Turkish nation is not similar to the English, French, Russian and German nations, which established only one state throughout their histories. The Turks are such a glorious nation that they founded 50 states worldwide, excluding minor states. He is proud to boast that this power and capability of enlargement, formation, and establishment is not granted to any nation except the Turks.

In his *Turkish History* the Turkish state is divided into 3 periods: the Seljukid dynasty, the Ottoman dynasty, and the Republic.¹⁹⁴

2.8. The Turkish Race

In *Turkish History* one can find Rıza Nur's ideas on race and the Turkish race, specifically. He classifies the races into 3 types: Turanian, Aryan, and Semitic. Europeans, Iranians, and Armenians are from the Aryan race; Arabs and Jews from the Semitic race; and Turks are from the Turanian race.¹⁹⁵

According to Rıza Nur, it was supposed that the issue of race would be best solved by anthropology, but this idea turned out to be wrong. This is explained by the fact that this science found people very diverse from an anatomic point of view. For example, among the French and German people there are different physical features; there are both brachycephalic and dolichocephalic people. He notes that there cannot be found a pure race in the world. The basis of the classification of race is accepted as the skull, the shape of the face, the length of the body, and the color of the skin, eye and hair. He accepts the idea that in the beginning there were separate races based on physical features, but afterwards because of migration, conquest, and colonization they mixed each other and new physical features came into existence; the former and new types continued through inheritance and influence of environment and then the ideas about race disappeared, which is why now there are mixed masses of people. He identifies all nations as "Synthese ethnique".¹⁹⁶

He mentions that European scientists consider Turks to be brachycephalic, but in his view, all the Turks had not been studied from the anthropological point of view.

¹⁹⁴ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 3-4, 13

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, cilt 1-2, 32

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, cilt 11-12, 423.

Today's Turks are both brachycephalic and dolichocephalic. In the world no pure race has remained; likewise, the Turks are also not pure from an anthropological point of view.¹⁹⁷

Rıza Nur devises his own definition of race. He stresses the idea that anthropology has not yet determined the diversity and number of races and that science has not developed yet. Also, linguistics cannot define race. He highlights that races cannot be classified by the anthropological point of view, and the best classification is that there are 3 types of races in the world: white, yellow, and black. This has nothing to do with brain size. He cites Lojander who mentioned that “the Turk is a perfect example of the White race. He has a beautiful face and blue eyes.” Rıza Nur deduces from his research that the Turks are from the White race. The Chinese are from Yellow race. The Mongols emerged from the mixture of Turks and Negroits. The Aryans and Turanians are from the White race. The Turanians are brachycephalic; the Aryans are dolichocephalic.¹⁹⁸

In his analysis Rıza Nur criticizes the tendency to find a relationship between race and intelligence, art, and civilization among European scholars. The latter ascribe these talents only to Aryans or dolichocephalic. They consider that Turanians and others have a low level of abilities. They consider dolichocephalic to be the most perfect brain size. Rıza Nur objects by saying that this was not proved scientifically as there were a number of civilizations built by brachycephalic people. He is highly critical that Europeans and their writers also see Turks as inferior race. They considered name “Turk” tantamount to barbarians, they insist that Turks do not have talent in art.¹⁹⁹

Rıza Nur finalizes his ideas by writing: “The Turks are from the White race; beautiful, with healthy body, and perfect brain, they have talents equal to Europeans in terms of art and civilization and it is even a higher race. He [the Turkish nation] is the most outstanding nation in the world. Only he needs to be educated”.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 11-12, 428.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 429.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 432.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 433.

CHAPTER 3

DR. RIZA NUR'S POSITION TOWARDS THE TURKISH HISTORY THESIS

3.1. The Turkish History Thesis: General Overview

During the 1930s the Kemalist elite undertook the task of constructing a new Turkish national identity through the official rewriting of Turkish history. This culminated in the emergence of the Turkish History Thesis. First, in April 1930 a committee was established as a branch of *Türk Ocakları* (Turkish Hearths) and was called *Türk Ocakları Türk Tarihi Tetkik Heyeti* (the Turkish Hearths' Committee for the Study of Turkish History). It was instructed by Atatürk to produce works on the Turkish history. The Committee's members included Mehmet Tevfik (Bıykoğlu), the president of the Committee and the general secretary of Mustafa Kemal; Yusuf Akçura, vice-president of the Committee; Dr. Reşit Galip, general secretary and deputy; Samih Rifat, Afet Inan, Sadri Maksudi; and Yusuf Ziya.²⁰¹ All the members were either a deputy or a member of the Republican People's Party. These "politician-historians" were institutionalized to rewrite the history and history textbooks.²⁰²

The first major study of the Committee, a 605-page book entitled *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (The Outlines of Turkish History), was published in 1930. Only one hundred copies of this book were printed, and they were distributed to certain historians and intellectuals for review.²⁰³ To reach a larger public, a shorter version of the book (90 pages) was published, with thirty thousand copies distributed in schools. The name

²⁰¹ Etienne Copeaux, *Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk İslam Sentezine*, (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998), 38.

²⁰² Büşra Ersanlı, *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye'de 'Resmî Tarih' Tezinin Oluşumu 1929-1937*, (İletişim Yayınları, 1996), 95.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 102-103.

of this book was *Türk Tarihinin Anahatları-Methal Kısmı* (Introduction to the Outlines of Turkish History).²⁰⁴

When the Turkish Hearths dissolved on April 15, 1931, the Turkish Hearths' Committee for the Study of Turkish History changed its name to the Society for the Study of Turkish History (*Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti*). This is the forerunner of the Turkish History Association (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*). The goal of the Society for the Study of Turkish History was to follow a different track from the Society of Ottoman History and rewrite Turkish history.²⁰⁵ The first initiative of this society was the production of a textbook for high school students; the four volumes were ready by the end of July 1931 and started to be used from September onwards of the same year. The textbooks were inspired by *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* and written by the same people. This urgency of hastily publishing the textbooks shows how the ruling elites signified the transfer of the "history reform" into the school textbooks.²⁰⁶

On July 2-11, 1932, the First Turkish History Congress was summoned in Ankara, initiated by the Ministry of Education and Mustafa Kemal. 18 university professors and assistants, and 25 members of *Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti* participated in the Congress. The vast majority of the participants (198) were teachers from secondary schools. Only 33 of the participants took active part in the discussions, and only 15 of the active participants presented papers.²⁰⁷ As the participants were comprised mainly of school teachers, it cannot be regarded as an academic congress. The Congress was launched after the distribution of the books which were used in the secondary education. The Congress aimed to popularize the official history thesis and familiarize school teachers with the new history education program which had been in use for one year.²⁰⁸

On September 20, 1937, a 6-day Second Turkish History Congress was convened. The vast majority of the participants were university professors and researchers. More than half of these experts (48 out of 90) came from Europe. This

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 106.

²⁰⁵ Büşra Ersanlı, 96.

²⁰⁶ Etienne Copeaux, 40.

²⁰⁷ Büşra Ersanlı, 119.

²⁰⁸ Etienne Copeaux, 46.

aimed at providing an international dimension to the Congress.²⁰⁹ According to Büşra Ersanlı, the main difference between the First and Second Congresses is that in the latter there were no discussions and critiques to the thesis. This can be commented as the manifestation of the “triumph of the Turkish history thesis.”²¹⁰

3.2. The Turkish History Thesis in the Textbooks

To provide a general understanding of the History Thesis, it is crucial to refer to some passages from a Turkish history textbook published in 1932 and *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*. As mentioned above, the history textbook, especially its first volume - *Tarih: Tarihten Evelki Zamanlar ve Eski Zamanlar* (History: Pre-historic and Ancient Times) - was overwhelmingly based on *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*. Therefore, a significant number of passages in the first volume are copied from *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*.

In the first chapters of the above-mentioned books one can find the description of the Turkish homeland. Central Asia and the Altai Mountains are declared to be the center of the Turkish race in ancient times. In this account, the Turks established civilization in Central Asia, and the domestication of animals and agriculture started there. At the end of the Ice Age when the glaciers receded, the climate changed. The change of climate (the drying of rivers and lakes, the transformation of green fields to deserts, and the hardening of economic life) led to migrations; they turned from a settled to a nomadic lifestyle. The Turks had to migrate from Central Asia and spread to China, India, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt, and from North Africa to Spain, Macedonia, and Greece. In some places they became the autochthonous population, while in others they brought civilization to the locals.²¹¹

Around 7000 BC Turks entered Northern China. In trying to determine the origins of the Chinese, two theories are presented. One theory states that the Chinese came from Kashgar, while another says that the first inhabitants of China originated

²⁰⁹ Büşra Ersanlı, 173.

²¹⁰ Büşra Ersanlı, 191.

²¹¹ *Tarih: Tarihten Evelki Zamanlar ve Eski Zamanlar*, I, (Istanbul Devlet Matbaası, 1932), 26-32. *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları: Kemalist Yönetimin Resmi Tarih Tezi*, 3. Basım, (Kaynak Yayınları, 1999), 58-59, 325-328.

from two different races: the local people and noble warriors who came from Central Asia. It is then narrated that it is not possible to determine the origins of the Chinese people based on these theories. The most certain point is that from the very beginning of Chinese history, China was constantly invaded by the Turks. In particular, Turks have migrated to North China since ancient times. “The fact is that in 2200 BC there were Turkish dynasties ruling the country, such as Hiya, Yin, Cheu and Tsin, that came from the west, Turkestan; as Chinese history sources state and archeological explorations confirm this information, Turkish civilization and dominance in China started 4000 years ago.”²¹² Turks played a big role in the change of the racial qualities of the Chinese. In the places, especially in the north where the Chinese had contact with the Turks, the brachycephalic race increased compared to dolichocephalic. Archeologist Anderson made excavations in Kansu and Honan, and compared the pieces to the ones found in Anav, in the east of Khazar, and claimed that both belonged to the same civilization. Anderson showed that the old civilization in Kansu was brought by migrations from Turkestan and then spread over the entirety of China.²¹³

The first population of India was the Munda people, who belonged to the Malayo-Polynesian family and lived in Indo-China and the Malaysian islands. This black population was expelled by the communities that had higher levels of development. The latter were “the Dravidians who came from Altay... There is a wrong notion that they were black; they are not black; they carried all the attributes of the Turkish type.”²¹⁴ The Dravidians succeeded in creating advanced civilization in India. Excavations revealed that such civilization existed in the Bronze Age. Archeologist John Marshall discovered traces of the 3000 BC civilization in Sindh and Punjab. The people led an urban life and twilled cotton clothes; apart from bronze instruments and gunflints, they had golden and silver ornaments, and ceramics. There were some similarities between the Sumerian and old Indian Languages. One of the statues found in Mohenjo-Daro was similar to Sumerian ones. This shows that Sumerians and Dravidians lived together for a long period before coming to Mesopotamia and India.²¹⁵

In *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, the passage on Egypt begins with a question, “Where do the Egyptian people who created the great civilization come from?” The

²¹² *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 59, 84.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 86.

²¹⁴ *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 120.

²¹⁵ *Tarih I*, 75, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 120-121.

reply is that the old Egyptians that settled near the Nile River and established civilization originate from *Tuareg* (reference from Morgan). This is the plural form of *Targui*, who are the Turks coming from the Khazar Sea to the Northern Africa. “The first Egyptian population is the White race coming from Asia in 5000 BC ... having settled in the Egyptian valley, the first people who founded civilization in Egypt are the Turks”.²¹⁶

As far as Iran is concerned, there is an attempt to originate the word Iran from the Turkish language. It is explained that in the Huzvaresh language, which was used in the Parthian and Sassanid times, Iran was pronounced as Eran. The names *Arya*, *Aryane*, and *Aryana* have the same root. Eran is taken from the word “er” which means man, hero, and brave (*erkek*, *mert*, *kahraman*) in Turkish. Among different nations this “er” or “ar” element can be found as the name of a person, a tribe, or a race. For example, among the Germanic tribes the best warrior was called *ari*. In the Anglo-Saxon language *ar* and in the Scandinavian language *aer* have the meaning honor and victory. In the Irish language *er* is used with the meaning of hero and man, similar to Turkish. The name Ireland also arose from *er*. The word Eran was first used as the name of a tribe and then remained as the name of the nation and place. This supports the idea that the first Iranians were Turanians. The founders of Iran are Anzanit Turks living in the southwestern part of Iran. They spoke in the Turkish-Oghuz dialect of the Turanian language.²¹⁷ “The political history of Iran begins with the Median dynasty in the 7th century BC. Some historians and archeologists consider Medians to be Turanian and Persians to be Aryan”.²¹⁸

Another wave of Turkish migration was directed to the west. In the southern direction Turks went to Mesopotamia. In prehistoric times several tribes settled in Mesopotamia, supposedly in 7000 BC and became the autochthon population there. These tribes had known how to make use of stone and bronze for a long time. These tribes opened the first historical period of humanity. The Egyptian history is long after their history. The three Turkish tribes - the Sumerians, the Akkadians, and the Elamites - came from Altay.²¹⁹ In the 19th century, French, English, German, and American

²¹⁶ *Tarih I*, 104-107, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 168-170.

²¹⁷ *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 273-274.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 277.

²¹⁹ *Tarih I*, 88-89, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 147.

explorations revealed the founders of the first civilization. They found the writing of the Sumerians to be cuneiform and their language to be Turkish.²²⁰

About 7000 years ago the Turks became autochthon in Anatolia and established the Hittite civilization in Anatolia.

“The population of Asia Minor are the Turks who were known as Hittites and by other similar names. They migrated from the Central Asian plateau to the west in pre-historic times. They have kinship relations with the Sumerians and the first autochthon inhabitants of Mesopotamia... The main language of the Hittites, as well as that of the Elamites and Sumerians is Turkish. It is not a Semitic or an Indo-European language. The Hittites are brachycephalic... So are Sumerians and Elamites”.²²¹

Turks migrated to the Aegean and Mediterranean regions as well. They became the ancestors of the Greeks. One piece of evidence is the Greek words having their origins in the Turkish language. The word Ion comes from the Turkish word *iy*, which means owner. According to Greek legends, Ion was the ancestors of the Greeks. The name Ionia was introduced by the Achaeans, who moved to the east when the Dorians invaded Anatolia. Ion meant king and owner. The word Ion belonged to the same family of Turkish words as *aka*, *eke*, *eti*, and *ata*, which have the same meaning. All the Turkish-Tatarian languages have the words “*iy*”, *Eg*, *Et*, and *It*. They mean *efendi*, lord, and owner. In the Uyghur language *ige*, *ite*, *iti* and *idi* means *efendi*, lord, and God. In the Chagatai language *ege* and *eye*, and in the Azeri language *yeymek* and *eymek* have the same meaning. The name of the sea *Egee* is similar to the Turkish *ege*, *eke*.²²²

Until recent times there was no idea who had lived in Greece before the Greeks. The Pelasges, Gariens, Leleges, or other names were articulated as the oldest dwellers of Greece. This was influenced by the old translations of historical events before Homer or they were just imaginary names. As a result of the explorations in Rhodes, several cities that existed in 2000 BC and some materials that did not have any relation to the Greeks were found. Since 1875, due to German Schilman's efforts the civilization that remained in darkness was revealed. It was older than the Indo-European culture and did not have any similarities with the Semitic people. It turned out that the first inhabitants of Aegean civilization were the Turks. The oldest civilization was centered in Crete. The Turkish civilization across southern Russia and the Danube River area penetrated

²²⁰ *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 149.

²²¹ *Tarih I*, 12-129, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 192-193.

²²² *Tarih I*, 184-85, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 219-220.

into Macedonia, Thessaly and Corinth in 3500 BC. About 3000 BC they spread over Greece.²²³ The Turks who came from the Danube River area founded the civilization which is called Mycenae. The exact name of the Mycenaean is *Aka* (Achaean).²²⁴ After the Dorian invasion in 1200 BC, the inhabitants of Crete and Mycenae, the Achaeans and the Eges, migrated to Anatolia, and they settled along the western shores of Anatolia. They again established civilization, which they named Ion civilization. This civilization spread to Greece; the well-known Greek civilization is actually this Ion or Iye civilization.²²⁵

As the Greek science, art, and philosophy stemmed from western Anatolia, so were the roots of Roman civilization there. The Etruscans who laid the foundation of Roman civilization went to Italy from Anatolia.²²⁶

3.3. The Interpretation of the Turkish History Thesis

To scrutinize the Turkish History Thesis more, first and foremost, it is stated that the Turks were an ancient race whose roots went back to Central Asia. They created a bright civilization in Central Asia. There is an enormous attempt to demonstrate Central Asia as not only the cradle of Turkish civilization and the brachycephalic race, but also of the whole of mankind, and also to show the Turkish race and civilization as being as ancient as possible. These are one of the major themes discussed at the First History Congress. Some of the participants trace the roots of Turkish civilization to 9000 BC, even earlier to 12000 BC, or to 7000 BC. “The Turkish homeland is Central Asia...The Turks were a race that had culture by at the latest 9000 BC.”²²⁷

Second, the Turkish History Thesis talks about Turkish migrations from their original homeland. They moved in all directions, thus civilizing the rest of the world. Accordingly, Turks are the creators of the ancient civilizations, such as China, India,

²²³ *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 227.

²²⁴ *Tarih I*, 193, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 232.

²²⁵ *Tarih I*, 203, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 235.

²²⁶ *Tarih I*, 32.

²²⁷ Afet İnan, “Tarihten Evel ve Tarih Fecrinde”, *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi: Konferanslar-Müzakere Zabıtları* (from now on *BTTK*), (Maarif Vekaleti, 1932), 30.

Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran, Anatolia, Greece, and Rome. This is emphasized in the opening speech of the Congress by the Minister of Education, Esat Bey.

“While Turks had passed the Paleolithic Age in Central Asia, their Homeland, by 12000 BC, Europeans were saved from this period only 5000 years later. While in other parts of the world people were still living in trees and rocks, Turks had already created a civilization of wood and metal, domesticated animals and started agriculture. At the end of the Ice Age after the lessening of the glaciers, which happened in the Neolithic Era, many Turkish tribes began to migrate because of these important natural changes. In this way, the Turks, who had developed agriculture and shepherding and discovered gold, copper, tin, and iron around 7000 BC, spread from Central Asia and disseminated the first civilization in the places they went, and thus laid the foundations of the Chinese and Indian civilizations in Asia; the Hittite civilization in Anatolia, which they accepted as their Sacred Homeland; the Sumerian civilization in Mesopotamia; and finally, the Egyptian, Mediterranean, and Roman civilizations, and saved Europe, the advanced civilization which we admire and follow today, from a cave life.”²²⁸

Etienne Copeaux indicates the map of these migrations presented in the school textbooks. According to his interpretation, as a visual element the map both summarizes and characterizes the history thesis. A map of Eurasia has been used in which Europe is thrown to the periphery; Africa is almost invisible; the homeland is emphasized with lines and arrows showing migration routes reaching up to Indonesia and Ireland. Copeaux mentions that this map was in use until the end of 1940s in the school textbooks.²²⁹

An essentially important point is the assertion that the Turks were the original, autochthonous inhabitants of Anatolia as they established the Hittite civilization. As expressed by Afet İnan in the speech delivered at the First History Congress, “Our ancient Hittites, our ancestors, were the first and autochthon inhabitants and owners of our today’s homeland. Thousands of years ago here they made their own land in the place of the homeland. They brought the center of Turkishness from Altay to Anatolia-Thrace. The non-collapsible rocks of this land are the firm foundations of the Turkish Republic”²³⁰

²²⁸“Maarif Vekili Esat Beyefendinin Açma Nutku”, *BTTK*, 6.

²²⁹ Etienne Copeaux, 41.

²³⁰ Afet İnan, “Tarihten Evel ve Tarih Fecrinde”, 41.

While developing the idea of the history thesis, Mustafa Kemal made the following remark:

“Our ancestors who built great states should also own a great and extensive civilization; this has to be searched, studied and informed to Turks and the world; it is a big debt for us. When Turkish children recognize their ancestors, they will find the strength to carry out greater actions. Having migrated here in the recent past, they cannot be the true owner of this homeland. This idea is wrong both historically and scientifically. The Turkish brachycephalic race created the first state in Anatolia”.²³¹

Etienne Copeaux provides a comprehensive analysis on this issue. According to him, with a number of fabrications, the Turkish identity should have been constructed around two geographical areas: Central Asia and Anatolia. In the 1920s and 1930s, Kemalist nationalists were in search of solutions for two challenges: to glorify Central Asia as the cradle of Turkish civilization in order to construct an identity detached from Muslim, and especially, Ottoman identity; and to portray the Turkish nation as the autochthon population of Anatolia to counter similar claims brought forward by Greek and Armenian nationalists. The historiography of the period was focused on Central Asian origins. Historians found the solution to the first challenge by using the finding that Turks had migrated from the east to the west from the Orhun inscriptions onwards (7th century AD).²³²

However, as Copeaux emphasizes, the Greeks and Armenians claimed Anatolia as their homeland; thus, it was crucial to “find Turkish ancestors” in Anatolia. For this purpose it was necessary to prove that Turks were there before Greeks and Armenians, and that Turks were the original inhabitants of Anatolia, in order to make their claim over the Anatolian territory legitimate. Copeaux indicates in his book that in 1906 excavations were started by the *Deutsch-Orient Gesellschaft* and that several facts had been revealed about the Hittite civilization (2000 BC). However, there was a problem with the Hittite language. The scholars could not find any connection between the Hittite language, which was called “Hieroglyph”, and other languages. The Kemalist nationalist historians made use of this gap and brought forward the idea that the Hittites are in fact Turks who had migrated from Central Asia. After some period the Hittite hieroglyph was found to have belonged to the Indo –European language family. For the

²³¹ Afet Inan, “Atatürk ve Tarih Tezi”, *Bellekten*, Vol. 3, No. 10, 1939, 245-246.

²³² Etienne Copeaux, 32.

Kemalist historians this finding was not important, since in 1936 the Sun Language theory would claim that all the languages originated from Turkish.²³³ However, the finding that Hittite language belonged to the Indo-European language family had happened long before the emergence of the Turkish History Thesis. A Czech Orientalist, known as the Father of Hittitology, Bedřich Hrozný, deciphered the Hittite language in 1915.²³⁴ This refutes Copeaux's argument that Kemalist historians made use of the Hittite language gap, as the historians must have been aware of the discovery. Therefore, they claimed the Turkishness of the Hittites knowing that the language belonged to the Indo-European family.

Another argument of the Thesis is that Turks belong to the White race. There was a dominant view among Europeans that Turks were of the Yellow race; the Yellow race was considered inferior. In the history textbook, races were classified into 4 groups according to the color of the skin: White, Mongol, Black in Africa, and Red in America. The Turks are located within the category of the White race. It is described that the territory from Lake Baikal, Central Asia to the Khazar Sea and Black Sea as far as the Aegean Sea and Danube River was populated by white skinned Turks for thousands and thousands of years.²³⁵ White people also live in Northern Asia and Europe, but the levels of whiteness are different from the Arctic zone to Eastern and Southern Asia. This is why the White race can be subdivided into 2 or 3 additional races. The people belonging to the White race are blonde, blue-eyed, and tall. It is then argued that the classification of people according to color is wrong because one can examine people when they are alive, whereas it is not possible to study human fossils because they lack color. This is why the racial differences can be obvious from the physical differences of skeletons. The important classification of races is based on head shape. However, this does not have any social meaning; the reason is that the head shape does not change, or it can be changed but the brain changes. The Turkish race is mostly brachycephalic.²³⁶

The discussion on race was a major topic at the Congress. It was constantly underlined that Turks are the representatives of the White race and have nothing to do

²³³ Ibid, 31-32.

²³⁴ Christian Falvey, "Bedřich Hrozný – Re-Discoverer of the Hittite Language" 13 May, 2012. <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/czechs/bedrich-hrozný-re-discoverer-of-the-hittite-language>

²³⁵ *Tarih I*, 15-17, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 46.

²³⁶ Ibid.

with the Yellow race. Reşit Galip described the Turks as tall, white-skinned, mostly blue-eyed, and one of the best examples of the White race²³⁷. Some participants presented the Turks as the Alpine type of the White race. Having acknowledged that there are two types of brachycephalic race –white-skinned and yellow-skinned - Şevket Aziz emphasizes that “Asia is the cradle of the brachycephalic men. They are the Alpine men, and Turks also belong to that type. According to the latest interpretations, we do not have any relation to the Yellows who have basically turned out to be far from being a race.”²³⁸

There was a tendency to show the brachycephalic race as superior to the dolichosephalic one. “It must be accepted that the brachycephalic people, particularly Alpines, have a biological superiority compared with the dolichocephalic people.”²³⁹ Several participants contended that the overwhelming majority of the population in Anatolia was brachycephalic and people of the White race. “Anatolia was inhabited by a wheat-colored brachycephalic or by a white, beautiful, blue-eyed, and brown-haired race. This race comes from Central Asia”; this brachycephalic White race has a relation to the Hittites, Sumerians, and Akkadians.²⁴⁰ Reşit Galip stated that anthropological studies proved that “under the realm of the Hittites around (70%) of the Anatolian population was formed of brachycephalic, Alpine type people... whereas the dolichocephalic element was revealed to be only 5.5%.”²⁴¹

In effect, the necessity to prove that Turks do not belong to the Yellow race, hence are not secondary to Europeans, has become the major impulse of creating the Turkish History Thesis. The origins of the Turkish history project go back to 1928. What influenced Atatürk to get started on this project is well narrated by Afet İnan in her article “Atatürk and the History Thesis”. In one of the French geography books it was mentioned that the Turkish race belonged to the Yellow race, and that, according to the Europeans, it was an inferior human type. Afet İnan showed this to Atatürk, asking if it was true. Atatürk replied: “No, it cannot be; we should deal with this. Work on it.”²⁴² The same year Ataturk made the following comment: “Turks could not have

²³⁷ Reşit Galip Bey, “Türk Irk ve Medeniyet Tarihine Umumî Bir Bakış”, *BTTK*, 159.

²³⁸ *BTTK*, 49.

²³⁹ Reşit Galip Bey, 113.

²⁴⁰ *BTTK*, 49.

²⁴¹ Reşit Galip Bey, 134.

²⁴² Afet İnan, “Atatürk ve Tarih Tezi”, *Belleten*, Vol. 3, No. 10, 1939, p. 244.

established an empire in Anatolia as a tribe. This should have another interpretation. The science of history should reveal it.”²⁴³

One of the main goals of the Turkish History Thesis was to break Western stereotypes about the Turks. They were keen on changing the Western image of the Turks as the nomadic people of the Yellow race and introducing the image of the Turks as civilized and as the creators of civilizations. It was essential for the nation to prove the equality of Turks to Europeans.

Hence, the Turkish History Thesis attempted to search for the ancestors of Europeans among the Turks, first through claiming that the Greek and Roman civilizations were created by Turks. Second, there have been propositions to count the Turks as members of the Aryan race. Afet İnan argued that the notion “Aryan” is originally Turkish. It derived from the Turkish word “er” which means man. Furthermore, she traced the origins of the Aryans in Central Asia. “Many scholars of Europe represent several Central Asian several tribes who brought civilization to Europeans and all parts of mankind, starting from pre-historic times, at the dawn and foundations of history, as their ancestors. These human masses called Aryan, Indo-European and Indo-German migrated from the (Altay-Pamir) plateau”.²⁴⁴

Overall, the Turkish History Thesis seems to be a response to an image of inferiority that Europeans ascribed to the Turks. The introductory part of the *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* illustrates the main reason why this history has been produced.

“The role of Turks in the world history has been, deliberately or not deliberately, degraded in most history books published in our country until now and the French history books which were their sources. Acquiring such wrong information about their ancestors has been destructive for Turks in terms of their self-recognition and the enhancement of their identity. The main aim of this book is to try to correct these mistakes, which are harmful for our nation, which has regained its natural status in the world today and lives with the awareness of that status; at the same time, this is the first step to fulfill the necessity of writing a national history for the Turkish nation, whose sense of identity and unity has been awakened due to the last great events.”²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Ibid, 244.

²⁴⁴ Afet İnan, “Tarihten Evel ve Tarih Fecrinde”, *BTTK*, 40.

²⁴⁵ *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*, 25.

Copeaux pinpoints that the Turkish history textbooks were addressed not only to the students, but through them to an upper recipient, those who looked down on the Turks, implying especially the Europeans.²⁴⁶

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the preponderant views among Orientalists about the Turks contained the following elements: first, before the 11th century, when the Turks became influenced by Islamic civilization, they were extremely nomadic, backward, and incapable of creating a civilization. Therefore the Oghuz invasion was accepted as destructive and regressive for classical Islamic civilization. It was believed that all the Turkic-Islamic states in history owed their civilizational accomplishments merely to the Islamic and Persian traditions.²⁴⁷ Second, the Orientalists claimed that as the Turks in Anatolia were so primitive, so tribal and lacked in any tradition of establishing big states, there must be another explanation for the birth of the Ottoman Empire. This line of thought suggested that the Turks could not have established an empire; what they did was just to copy Byzantine institutions. The Ottoman Empire was defined not as a continuation of the Great Seljukid and Anatolian Seljukid Empire, but as a continuation of Byzantium. This idea of “*Byzance après Byzance*” or “Muslim Roman Empire” was developed originally by Iorga.²⁴⁸ The third extension of this idea was that the Ottomans’ system of law –if there existed such thing- was a repetition of classical Islamic law; after the Ottomans conquered Constantinople, it became an imitation of the Byzantine law.²⁴⁹

This Orientalist discourse about the Turks and the Ottoman Empire influenced Turkish historiography to a large degree. This gave rise to a “defensive historiography”; Atatürk’s History Thesis was of this kind.²⁵⁰ The Thesis abandoned Namik Kemal’s idea that “we created a world-conqueror state from a tribe”²⁵¹, and Atatürk tacitly agreed with the “*Byzance après Byzance*” idea in the sense that “the Turks could not, as a tribe, have created an empire in Anatolia”.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Etienne Copeaux, 16.

²⁴⁷ Halil Bertkay, *Cumhuriyet Ideolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, (Kaynak Yayınları, 1983) ,19.

²⁴⁸ Halil Bertkay, “The Search for the Peasant in Western and Turkish History/Historiography” in Bertkay and Faroqhi (eds.), *New Approaches to State and Peasant in Ottoman History*, (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 138. Halil Bertkay, *Cumhuriyet Ideolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, 19-20.

²⁴⁹ Halil Bertkay, *Cumhuriyet Ideolojisi ve Fuat Köprülü*, 20-22.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 50.

²⁵¹ “Cihangirane bir devlet çıkardık bir aşiretten”, Ibid, 56.

²⁵² Halil Bertkay, “The Search for the Peasant”, 142.

Thus, one of the main features of the History Thesis is that Turkish history did not begin with the Ottoman Empire; Turks created 18 states in pre-Ottoman and pre-Islamic times.²⁵³ This state-making talent opposes the above-mentioned Orientalist outlook that Turks were nomadic and incapable of developing civilization before accepting Islam. Stressing the creation of the states prior to the conversion to Islam was a reaction to the point that the Turkish states owed their state-making to Islamic traditions. At the Second History Congress, Sadri Maksudi in his speech underlines that the Turkish race has a special talent in establishing states not only within their homeland, but also outside their homeland. Even when the state collapses, Turks immediately establish a new state; they always remain independent politically and deliver peace in various corners of the world. “The historical truth is the nation that has established the most states in the world is the Turks. The wrong idea is that the Turks who established states are nomadic... None of the Turkish states have been built by nomadic Turks.”²⁵⁴ In Afet İnan’s words, Turkish children should be aware and should make people know that “They are not a nation arising from a tribe of 400 tents, but a ten thousand year old, Aryan, civilized, and highly talented nation of high racial descent.”²⁵⁵

This point at the same time shows its anti-Ottoman dimension. It is no surprise that only 50 pages were dedicated to Ottoman history in the *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları*.²⁵⁶ This can be explained also from the Kemalist regime’s attitude towards the Ottoman state, that is to say the *ancien regime* which it had to extricate itself from. Therefore, the Kemalists “came to paint the relationship between the Ottoman state and themselves in black and white”.²⁵⁷

Through history writing Kemalists were trying to construct a secular identity as opposed to the Islamic and Ottoman heritage. This was sharpened because of the Orientalist perception about the Ottoman Empire. Thus, there was a problem for the newly constructed nation to see itself as an inheritor of the Ottoman Empire. The political corollary of this “*Byzance après Byzance*” idea was that the Ottoman Empire was an historical accident and that as imitators the Turks had no right to rule the lands

²⁵³ Büşra Ersanlı, “Bir Aidiyet Fermanı: Türk Tarih Tezi,” in Mehmet Ö. Alkan (ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce*, Vol.4, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 805.

²⁵⁴ Sadri Maksudi Arsal, “Beşeriyet Tarihinde Devlet ve Hukuk Mefhumu ve Müesseselerinin İnkişafında Türk Irkının Rölü, *İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi*, 1937, 1068.

²⁵⁵ Afet İnan, “Tarihten Evel ve Tarih Fecrinde”, *BTTK*, 41.

²⁵⁶ Etienne Copeaux, 40.

²⁵⁷ Halil Berktaş, “The Search for the Peasant,” 137,140.

seized from Byzantium. One of the main preoccupations of the Kemalist regime was how to legitimize their right to have a sovereign state in Asia Minor. Consequently, in opposition to this Orientalist ideology and worried that the Turks would never completely appropriate Anatolia as their own if they accepted that they had only migrated there in the 11th century, Atatürk instructed his closest associates to develop a doctrine that the original diaspora of “Turkish civilization” had taken place in the 7th millennium BC. “Turkicising” all the ancient civilizations meant that the Turks had been in the Near East and Anatolia from the very beginning.²⁵⁸ This solved the issue in the sense that the Turks held a legitimate right to Anatolia not as heirs of the Ottoman Empire, but as the autochthon population of the territory.

The last point about the Turkish History Thesis is that it differed from Nazi racism in the sense that “instead of setting up the Turks as a master race distinct from everybody else, it tended to recover a unity with all world history as ‘Turkish’- we are all one, it both asserted and pleaded we cannot be kept out; in fact we are, ineradicably, mankind. And here we see again that Atatürk was interested in establishing Turkey’s European credentials by whatever means possible.”²⁵⁹

These are all the basic tenets of the Turkish History Thesis. As it has been observed, the Thesis was mainly triggered by the Western conception of the Turks and resulted in creating a mythical fabricated history that was not grounded scientifically.

3.4. Rıza Nur and the Turkish History Thesis

Rıza Nur’s *Turkish History* was written and published a few years before (1924-1926) the Turkish History Thesis came into play. Rıza Nur’s book was published and promoted by Mustafa Kemal. In his memoirs, Rıza Nur indicated, “According to what Latife informed Mustafa Kemal was following my *Turkish History* very carefully. It was put on his table and was always in his hands. He marked a lot of things”.²⁶⁰ In

²⁵⁸ Halil Berktaş, “The Search for the Peasant,” 139-141.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 141.

²⁶⁰ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve hatıratım*, III, 296.

another case Rıza Nur asserted, “Many of the things that Mustafa Kemal carried out as reforms he had learned from me. Likewise, he learned from my *Turkish History*”.²⁶¹

Accordingly, this poses a question: did Rıza Nur have any influence over the Turkish History Thesis?

Copeaux emphasized three intellectuals who influenced the development of the Turkish history thesis. The first one was Yusuf Akçura who was the first to articulate Turkist ideas explicitly in his *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* published in 1904. He was also a founding member of the *Türk Tarihi Tetkik Cemiyeti*. In the historical periodization proposed by Yusuf Akçura, namely the Ancient Turkish period (until the 13th century), union with Ghengiz Han, the states which emerged after the collapse of the Turkish-Mongol Empire, and the awakening of the Turkish people, he mentioned neither the acceptance of Islam by the Turks nor Islamic history. These ideas were crucial as they pointed to a Turkish identity separate from the Islamic identity which was taken also by the Turkish History Thesis.²⁶² The second prominent person whose ideas affected the official Turkish History thesis was Ziya Gökalp. According to Copeaux, the basic patterns of the Thesis were formulated by Ziya Gökalp in his book *Türkçülüğün Esasları* (1923). Gökalp defined all the former Turkish political communities as independent, unified and institutionalized states. These states were committed to bringing peace to the world, and they rested on the principles of equality, feminism, and tolerance.²⁶³ The third ideological forefather was Zeki Velidi Togan, who was of Bashkir origin and moved to Turkey a few years after the Bolshevik Revolution, between 1927 and 1932 teaching Turkish history at Istanbul University. The first part, “The ancient era of Turkish history”, of his book, entitled *Umumi Türk Tarihine Giriş* (1928), most probably, as Copeaux argues, was one of the sources of inspiration of the Turkish History Thesis. In this book, he spoke of the brachycephalic quality of the Turkish “race” and described the prehistorical migrations to Italy, Mesopotamia, India, and Egypt whose uncivilized people were civilized by the Turks.²⁶⁴

To manifest whether Rıza Nur had any influence on the Turkish History Thesis or not and how much the latter is in accordance with Rıza Nur’s ideas, we should compare

²⁶¹ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve hatıratım*, III, 532.

²⁶² Etienne Copeaux, 25-26.

²⁶³ *Ibid*, 27.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 28-29.

the two texts. If we compare the two national history narratives -Rıza Nur's *Turkish History* and the Turkish History Thesis -we can see many overlapping parts. Similar to the Turkish History Thesis, Rıza Nur talks about the fact that the Turkish race came into the historical stage in Altay. The Turkish migrations to different directions are among the ideas touched upon by him. Both narratives stress that the Turks brought civilization to the rest of the world. Rıza Nur has the same line that the Sumer, Akkad, and Elam states in Mesopotamia and the Hittite state are Turkish. In addition, Rıza Nur argues that the Turks founded civilizations in Iran, India, and China. Claiming the originality behind the finding about the Hyksos people in the Egyptian history, he offers evidence that the Hyksos are of Turkish descent. The Turkish origin of the Hyksos was repeated in the school textbook *Tarih*.²⁶⁵ According to Rıza Nur, Turanians belong to the White race as was likewise sorted out by the Turkish History Thesis.²⁶⁶ (With a difference that Rıza Nur rejects the existence of a Mongol race and considers the Mongols as the Turanian race).

These ideas that are similar between Rıza Nur's *Turkish History* and the Turkish History Thesis have not been propounded by Akçura and Gökalp. Copeaux pointed out Zeki Velidi Togan's history work as a source of inspiration for the History Thesis. Togan has ideas that somehow intersect with those of Rıza Nur; however, it is worth noting that Togan's *Umumi Türk Tarihine Giriş* was published in 1928, later than Rıza Nur's *Turkish History*.

One of the key differences between the two texts is that Rıza Nur does not imagine the Turks as the ancestors of the Greek and Roman civilizations; the migrations, according to him, do not reach Greece and Italy. The notion of the Turkish origins of Etruscans, Achaeans, Mycenaean or Greeks can be found nowhere in *Turkish History*.²⁶⁷ The reason for this is that Rıza Nur had anti-western inclinations. This was contrary to the Kemalist ideology. Rıza Nur thought that Westernization would obliterate Turkish identity and Turkish originality. "It is a huge mistake that Mustafa Kemal presumes to make Turks completely Europeans by destroying their culture. First of all, this is virtually impossible. Turks cannot become fully Europeans".²⁶⁸ Kemalists emphasized the similarities with Europeans through the Turkish History Thesis with the

²⁶⁵ *Tarih I*, 114-115.

²⁶⁶ Rıza Nur's ideas on these issues are discussed in Chapter 2.

²⁶⁷ See Chapter 2.

²⁶⁸ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, vol II, 476.

aim of catching up with the West, “reaching the contemporary level of civilizations”, whereas Rıza Nur had a goal of highlighting the superiority of the Turkish race amongst other races.

Unlike the History Thesis, which attempts to bypass Ottoman and Islamic heritages, Rıza Nur does not reduce their significance in Turkish history. In his thinking, the Turkish Republic is a continuation of the Ottoman Empire. It was Rıza Nur who put forth the idea that the Seljukids and the Ottomans are dynasties of the same state, Turkey, and the dynasties were followed by the Republic. Hence, he stressed the longevity of Turkey and ascribed 9 centuries of political existence to it, dividing the history of Turkey into 3 periods- the Seljukid dynasty, the Ottoman dynasty, and the Republic.²⁶⁹

With regards to Rıza Nur’s view on Islamic roots, in his historical periodization Islam stands as a demarcation line dividing pre-Islamic Turkish history and history following the acceptance of Islam by the Turks. However, he is aware that “after becoming Muslim, Turks forgot their nation”; instead they contributed to Arabic and Persian cultures. This is why he clearly distinguishes the Turkish identity from the Muslim identity and tries to “return the contributions” that Turks made as Muslims to their real owners, the Turks. This ends up glorifying the Turks and Turkicizing states, dynasties, and monuments in narrating the Turkish role in Islamic civilization. He tries to single out the Turks among other Muslim nations as a glorious nation, showing Turks as the great defender and head of the Islamic world.

Finally, both narratives are a reaction against the Western Orientalist perception of Turks. Both of them try to reveal the historical truth about the Turks that they are not an inferior race, and that they have established civilizations.

In order to have a full picture of Rıza Nur’s position towards the Turkish History Thesis, it is worth mentioning his observations on it. While in his self-imposed exile in Paris, Rıza Nur follows the events taking place in Turkey very carefully through reading the newspapers and meeting people coming from Turkey. He makes comments on every single important event; these comments are a part and parcel of the third volume of his memoirs. Certainly, he cannot remain silent about the Turkish History Thesis. We can

²⁶⁹ See Chapter 2. Rıza Nur, *Türk Tarihi*, cilt 3-4, 10-13.

observe a number of reactions that Rıza Nur makes towards the History Thesis since the inception of the project. The first comment as such was written by him on the 1st of June, 1930.

“Recently, the annual congress of *Türkocağı* was held in Ankara. A teacher named Afet Hanım suggested to write a scholarly Turkish history. Everyone applauded and a committee was formed. The president of the committee became the secretary of the President, Geldani Tefvik... Tefvik is incredibly ignorant. Other members are the same. This is Mustafa Kemal's action against my *Turkish History*. He wants to say that my book is not scholarly. He will write a scholarly work now. Some period ago he [Mustafa Kemal] asked for books through the ambassador Fethi. He [Fethi] asked [the books] from me. I told him about one or two books. He sent [them]. Let's see if he [Mustafa Kemal] will become a scholar with these books. Except the ones that have been sent in my work there are two hundred more books in the bibliography; I spent 15 years of my life on that book. Now he is going to become a genius of Turkish history in one year. He will write history for his benefit. This is obvious. It will be eulogy, not history”.²⁷⁰

After ten days Rıza Nur made the following remark:

“One day later in the same newspaper Mustafa Kemal asked Yunus Nadi and Abdülhak Hamid the meaning of the term “aryan”; they did not know, and Mustafa Kemal explained, “This word comes from the Turkish “ari” which means clean; in French it is propre”. This is such a dumb and ignorant explanation. No one has ever seen such fabrication. Mustafa Kemal started to demonstrate his scholarship of Turkish history.... He is saying that the Turks are not of the Turanian race and Mongolian type, but they are Aryan... Incredible courage, incredible ignorance...He promoted Afet Hanım; she is going to write Turkish History. Poor history, what it will look like. One year ago, one day Fethi sent me a note.“I received a letter and telegraph from Mustafa Kemal. He asked for sources on Turkish history. I thought that you know about this. I will ask this from you”. I told him about Grousset's *The History of the Far East* and a few general history books, because there is no Turkish history book written in French or other European languages. Some chapters have been published in parts. Only I collected all this in one book. I said that he [Mustafa Kemal] can read monographies. He [Fethi] said, “It takes years, he cannot”. Anyway, he sent one or two general history books that I had said. After one year, in the newspapers it was written with applauses that Mustafa Kemal is a scholar of Turkish history and he wrote Turkish history. He became a scholar with these inadequate and primitive books that I recommended”.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve hatıratım*, III, 345.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, 436.

As it becomes evident, the overall tone is critical. This poses a question: why is Rıza Nur critical? One of the most important points in the passage above is that he is criticizing Kemal's intention to represent Turks from the Aryan race and not as representatives of the Turanian race. This can be explained by ideological differences between Rıza Nur and the Kemalist ruling elite. As has been discussed above, in his *Turkish History* Rıza Nur elevates the Turanian race and shows its superiority as a great race. He does not make a claim for Turks to enter the European family; he does not want to make them Europeans; he sees the Turanian race as distinct from the Aryan race. Rıza Nur's criticism emanates from his resistance to westernization, as, according to him, it will be destructive for Turkishness. Besides, it can be assumed from his words, "no one has ever seen such fabrication", and "incredible ignorance", that he considers the ascription of Turks to the Aryan race as scientifically incorrect as well.

After two years we see another comment of Rıza Nur concerning the History Congress. This is what he wrote on July 17, 1932.

"In Ankara Mustafa Kemal launched the History Congress. 230 history teachers took part. Mostly the speakers are the members of the History committee: Afet Hanım, Doktor Reşid Galib, Yusuf Akçura, and others. They speak much nonsense; make the whole world Turkish. The aim of all these meetings and conferences is clear: glorify and magnify Mustafa Kemal. It is 8 years Mustafa Kemal is a genius of military, politics, and agriculture... Now he has the caprice to make himself a great historian... The goal of the congress can be summarized: unknown things in history have been discovered by Mustafa Kemal, he has created theories, and has become a great historian and genius of history. If I collect all the sycophantic words expressed at the Congress, pages will be filled up... Yusuf Akçura calls this person the *hoca* of the nation. ... This congress discusses how history should be taught to the Turkish children at schools, what Turkish national history looks like, which events should be mentioned; the writing of the Turkish national history for primary, middle and high schools should be discussed, and three works must be written. European scholars will laugh at the superstition of this conference.... This man [Mustafa Kemal] is never ashamed of anything. In the published history work he shows on the map with arrows the places that the Turks invaded. There is no place that Turks have not gone. Because of the word (Ege) he represented Greeks as Turks, and because of the (Ir) syllable the Irishmen became Turks. It is very ridiculous and foolish. He forgot poor Iran... If the nations with (Ir) are Turks, what is wrong with Iran? It also starts with (Ir). Yes, it is so absurd."²⁷²

²⁷² Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve hatıratım*, III, 546-547.

Rıza Nur's critique of "making the whole world Turkish" and "there is no place that Turks have not gone" seems ambiguous, since Rıza Nur's history narrative was far from being a purely scholarly work as well. He was also ambitious in making not the whole, but "most of the world" Turkish. According to Rıza Nur's *Turkish History*, Turanians went even to America and established a state and civilization in Peru and Mexico. The point that he disagrees with the claim that the Greeks and Irish are of Turkish descent again demonstrates his aversion to make Turks westerners. He criticizes the methodology as well.

Rıza Nur shows the same attitude in respect to an event which he comes to label as "Ege" comedy. In Paris Rıza Nur met a few people who came from Istanbul and told a story. A ship was bought, and Mustafa Kemal named it Ege, because, according to Kemal, this word is Turkish. The Ege word of the French was taken by the Greeks from the Turkish word. In French this word is used for the name of the Aegean Sea. Rıza Nur and these people laughed much. Rıza Nur continues narrating that one day, "Gazi asked Necip Asım what Ege means. He [Necip Asım] said a few useless things. Gazi spoke like scolding a servant, "You are very ignorant, you do not know anything, Shut up..... He [Mustafa Kemal] said listen, I will teach you. The origin of Ege is Ege, because it is a Turkish word. It means island. It means that the islands and population are Turkish. Later they became inhabited by the Greeks". It is perfect.... The Turkish history that he has written is also full of nonsense... I do not know whether to cry or laugh."²⁷³

What can be inferred from all these excerpts from the memoirs is Rıza Nur's approach is critical mostly in relationship to portraying the Greeks as Turks and the Turks as Aryans. Apart from evaluating the scientific accuracy of these ideas, it is in conflict with his perception of Turkishness.

The major critique is addressed to the persona of Mustafa Kemal. Thus, this acquires more of a personal dimension than a scholarly one. An example will illustrate this argument more clearly. It is surprising to find Rıza Nur's negative view about Atatürk's claim to attribute Turkish origins to the Hittites. "Now he [Mustafa Kemal] declares that the Hittites are Turks and he is doing excavations to prove [this]; he will prove [it]! Because he is a master in the falsification of political documents, so can he

²⁷³ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve hatıratım*, III, 468.

do it in science very well.”²⁷⁴ As has been expressed earlier, Rıza Nur has made arguments in *Turkish History* that the Hittites are Turks. Why then he is criticizing that Atatürk has the same ideas? There are two options: either Rıza Nur has changed his ideas about the Hittites in the years ensuing the writing of his work or because of his animosity towards Atatürk he is changing his views on the Hittites and criticizing Mustafa Kemal. The latter option is more viable since, according to Rıza Nur’s account in his memoirs, in Paris a Hittite Community was formed (1930) and Rıza Nur became a member. The Community organized conferences about the Hittites at the Louvre museum. After one year, in the newspaper *Milliyet*, Rıza Nur read that the Hittite Community became under the auspices of Mustafa Kemal, and all the members of *Türk Tarih Tetkikati Cemiyeti* under the leadership of Tevfik became members of this community, and Rıza Nur’s membership was also mentioned in the same article. When Rıza Nur saw this, in his words, he got disgusted and immediately quit his membership.²⁷⁵

The critique to the History Thesis to a large extent emanates from Rıza Nur’s main conflict with Mustafa Kemal, which has been discussed in the first chapter in detail. In line with it, he makes fun of Mustafa Kemal that he became “a great historian” and “genius of history” assuring that Mustafa Kemal has become a scholar “due to the books that he recommended”. Therefore, Rıza Nur starts to disagree that the Hittites are Turks.

²⁷⁴ Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve hatıratım*, III, 436.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 503.

CONCLUSION

Turkish History, written by Dr. Rıza Nur, and the Turkish History Thesis, launched by the Kemalist regime, can be regarded as varieties of the Turkish national historiography of the early Republican era. Both are products of the same age of nationalism, and in general terms have common patterns. If without going into specific details, one attempts to make generalizations of both of these texts of Turkish national history writing, there can be observed the following common distinctive features.

The historical narratives were produced to challenge European misconceptions about the Turks, who were seen as an inferior race in the eyes of Europeans. Thus, the historiography aimed at disclosing the historical truth and magnifying Turks. Apart from this, it had a clear-cut Turkism mission. It was crucial to acquaint the nation with its own history for the sake of inculcating pride. To meet these ends, first and foremost, the nation's antiquity was highlighted; the Turkish race was declared to be very old and existent since time immemorial. Second, the Turks were claimed to be the founders of civilizations, especially the ancient civilizations. It was attempted to prove their contribution in the rise of civilizations and to show not only Turkish mastery in warfare, but also to stress their civilizational and cultural accomplishments. This was ultimately intended to discard the notion of Turks as nomads or warriors. Another aspect was the demonstration of Turkish talent in state-formation; therefore, it was necessary to underline the creation of as many states as possible. Finally, the accent was laid on the Turkish race, so the history narratives had racist connotation.

This study attempted to show whether Dr. Rıza Nur had any influence over the Turkish History Thesis. Therefore, this thesis compared *Turkish History* with the Turkish History Thesis. It took the lead from what Rıza Nur claimed in his autobiography- "Many of the things that Mustafa Kemal carried out as reforms he had learned from me. Likewise, he learned from my *Turkish History*" and "Mustafa Kemal was following my *Turkish History* carefully... marked a lot of things"- and took into account the fact that Rıza Nur's *Turkish History* was published a few years before the advent of the Turkish History Thesis. Notably, despite the fact that the Kemalist and Rıza Nur's nationalist outlooks were divergent, in the 1930s through the Turkish

History Thesis they converged because of an emphasis on the Turkish race. This provided more ground for comparison.

What has been observed from the comparison of the two historical narratives is that there are a significant number of overlapping aspects. The arguments made by Rıza Nur in *Turkish History* about Turkish migrations; civilizing the rest of the world; and the Turkish origins of the Hittite, Sumerian, Akkadian, and Elamite, as well as the Indian, Chinese and Iranian civilizations are similarly stated in the Turkish History Thesis. Since there are similarities, there is a high chance that Rıza Nur has influenced these aspects.

However, the comparison demonstrates that there are also a number of differences. The fundamental divergence is in the point that the Turkish History Thesis claims the Turkicity of the Greek and Roman civilizations and Turks as representatives of the Aryan race. There is also dissimilarity also in the way they viewed Ottoman and Islamic roots. It was argued that they had different goals. As the Kemalist project of westernization, Kemalists intended to prove that the Turks were a part of Western civilization. Bypassing Islamic and Ottoman origins- the creation of a secular identity- served the goal of claiming westernization as well, whereas Rıza Nur was hostile to the westernization discourse and did not neglect Islamic and Ottoman heritages.

In analyzing Rıza Nur's stance towards the Turkish History Thesis, it was referred to Rıza Nur's autobiography, in which the narrative of his comments can be found. Since there are a number of similarities between his history work and the Kemalist History Thesis, this implies that Rıza Nur would agree at least with the overlapping parts. However, what becomes evident is he is completely critical of the Turkish History Thesis. Not only does he criticize the ideas that are divergent but also disapproves of some arguments that are identical. His critique can be interpreted in three dimensions. First, from a scholarly dimension, he finds the scientific inaccuracy of some claims of the Turkish History Thesis, since he is more of a "historian" than the authors of the Turkish History Thesis. A second dimension regards ideological differences between Rıza Nur and the Kemalist regime, namely in regard to the westernization policy. Third, his critique derives from the political discordance with Mustafa Kemal; hence, it obtains a personal dimension as well.

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