Thesis for obtaining a "Master of arts" degree in philosophy Radboud University Nijmegen

Author: Bala Ersay

Student ID: 1000571

Supervisor: Evert van der Zweerde

Date: 02 / 19 / 2021

I hereby declare and assure that I, Bala Ersay, have drafted this thesis independently, that no other sources and/or means other than those mentioned have been used and that the passages of which the text content or meaning originates in other works - including electronic media - have been identified and the sources clearly stated. Place: Nijmegen date: 02 / 19 / 2021

Part I (Publishable Article): Introducing the Late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey into the Decolonial Debate

Abstract: This paper introduces the late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey into the decolonial debate by exploring the possibility of a radical delinking from the hegemonic articulations of Turkishness and Muslimness in today's multipolar world. It tries to find answers to the question how the arrival of the "myth" of modernity characterized the Turkish-Islamic mono-cultural state and civilization projects as simultaneously self-colonizing and colonizing ones. Its main objective is to provide a preliminary study for the critical-decolonial analysis of the complex story of the movement of modernity from the West into Turkey together with its underlying colonial logic. First, I examine the debates on decolonization from Fanon to more recent decolonial scholars, while reflecting on the absence of Turkey in these accounts. Then, I will provide an overview of the rise of structural Islamism and Turkism under the late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey as all-pervasive yet invisible racist structures derived from a local imitation of white supremacism. Finally, I will reflect on the self-racializing logic of 'catching up' with the West and its effects on Turkey's racialized minorities.

Key words: Ottoman Empire, Turkey, decoloniality, modernity / coloniality, modernization, structural Islamism, structural Turkism, coloniality of contemporaneity

Introduction:

> "We are witnessing the most violent days of the armed conflict. In the midst of civilian deaths, wounded people who could not be taken to the hospital, funerals that have been

3

waiting for weeks to be buried, curfews, and the return of forced migration, Kurdish provinces are unable to breathe."[1]

The recent politicization of the terms "being suffocated" and "not being able to breathe" in geographies beyond the US, such as Kashmir, Palestine, and Kurdistan across the states of India, Israel, and Turkey, show that these words provide an important tool today to explain a peculiar global phenomenon. This phenomenon is often created by localized racist systems of thought that are half-heartedly trying to imitate the white supremacist systems of thought originated in Europe. Long before Eric Garner and George Floyd did, it was Frantz Fanon who reminded us, in 1952, that suffocation is experienced by all colonized peoples living in a colonial situation. Suffocation was a fundamental but often overlooked theme in Fanon's thoughts on decolonization. He applied the term to the conditions of all colonized peoples, or all the peoples "in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave".[2] But as Fanon warns his readers, suffocation cannot be simply ended by the revival of a civilization and culture from their ashes that have been systematically neglected, or utterly devastated, under a so-called 'higher' civilization and culture:

> "In no way do I have to dedicate myself to reviving a black civilization unjustly ignored. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to sing the past to detriment of my present. It is not because the Indo-Chinese discovered a culture of their own that they revolted. Quite simply this was because it became impossible for them to breathe, in more than one sense of the word."[3]

It is yet not an easy task to find the place of a non-Western colonial situation such as Turkey and its peoples in a Manichean world of colonizers and the colonized. Perhaps this was among the reasons why Fanon never mentioned Turkey and its anti-colonial struggle in his writings on the shortcomings of political independence under nationalist political parties.[4] Turkish has been one of the latest, if not the latest, languages in the Middle East to invent a vocabulary for decolonization[5],

---

[1] Danzikyan, 2016. An Armenian author reflecting on the conditions of Kurdish provinces following the end of the peace process between the Turkish state and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).
[2] Fanon, 2008, p. 2
[3] P. 201
[4] Fanon reflects on a number of anti-colonial struggles in post-Ottoman contexts from Algeria to Lebanon, but he never mentions Turkey, though Turkey has been one of the first nation-states formed after an armed struggle for independence against European occupation.
[5] For the past few years, some scholars in Turkey have been using the term *sömürgesizleştirmek* literally meaning to deprive someone of their colonies.

which shows how vague the living memory of the brief European occupation (1918-1923) among Anatolian / East Thracian peoples compared to other parts of the Middle East. Turkey, on the one hand, can be still understood as just another part of the 'Global South', of which European intellectuals developed such narratives as 'the Sick Man of Europe' and 'the Ottoman decline thesis' to ignore its cultures and ways of knowing. But on the other hand, Turkey has been positioning itself as the closest point to being modernized among Muslim-majority countries since its foundation, where the systematic attempts to erase Kurdish culture as well as the ongoing resistance against the occupying Turkish state can be seen as a typical Fanonian case of colonial situation.

This paper introduces the late-Ottoman Empire[6] and Turkey into the decolonial debate by exploring the possibility of a radical delinking from the hegemonic articulations of Turkishness and Muslimness in today's multipolar world. It tries to find answers to the question of how the arrival of the "myth" of modernity characterized the Turkish-Islamic mono-cultural state and civilization projects as simultaneously self-colonizing and colonizing ones. Finding definite answers to this question is not my aim here. It is rather to provide the preliminary study for the critical-decolonial analysis of the complex story of the movement of the myth of modernity from the West into Turkey together with its underlying colonial logic. In the first section, I examine the debates on decolonization from Fanon to decolonial thinkers such as Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo and reflect on the absence of Turkey in these accounts. Second, I examine the rise of structural Islamism and Turkism under the late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey and question the role of the mono-cultural Turkish-Islamic 'modern' civilization project in the first systematic genocide in the history of Islam. Lastly, I will expand my observations in the previous section and reflect on the self-racializing 'catching up' with the West logic, which has been manifesting itself in dominant conception of modernization as becoming 'contemporary' with the West.

Turkishness studies as an interdisciplinary field has emerged and distinguished itself from Turkish studies only in the past couple of years. Although such themes as the rise of Turkish-Sunni supremacism in late-Ottoman political culture have appeared earlier during the early-2000s in several publications by postcolonial scholars such as Ussama Makdisi and Selim Deringil, the 2018 book *Turkishness Contract* by Barış Ünlü can be seen as the first canonical study in this new field. With this book, Ünlü became the first to examine the intersection of structural Turkism and Islamism, and the

---

[6] The late-Ottoman Empire here implies the period from the final quarter of the nineteenth century until the abolishment of the Sultanate in 1923.

transformation of Turkishness and Muslimness into the ultimate precondition for inclusion, reward, social mobility, and safety in the late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey. Turkishness and Muslimness are defined in structural terms by Ünlü through the metaphor of contract, which operate in many ways similar to how whiteness operates in Western societies. They transcend all social classes and ideologies and manifest themselves among the majority of Turks in such forms as seeing, hearing, knowing, and being emotionally affected from injustices inflicted on others, or not seeing, not hearing, not knowing, and not being emotionally affected from injustices inflicted on others.[7]

Both Muslimness and Turkishness contracts, in other words, require active participation from the people, or peoples, they include in terms of certain performances and inactions. In times of crisis, these performances can take the form of active participation in violent measures against racialized others. But more often, they take the form of indifference towards violence.[8] The Turkish state's ongoing policies of erasure and assimilation of Kurds as well as the Ottoman genocide of Armenians and its subsequent denial are the two main cases emphasized by Ünlü that reflect most dramatically the dimensions of not seeing, not hearing, and not being emotionally affected among the majority of Turks.[9] Muslimness and Turkishness contracts also have a top down character in the sense that they have been maintained, guaranteed, and updated if necessary through a web of state-linked political, religious and judicial institutions, together with media, university and other educational institutions.[10]

Ünlü's book, without exaggeration, has paved the way for an entirely new trajectory and marks the first attempt to highlight the similarities between structural Islamism / Turkism and white supremacism. The book played a major role in this study in the sense that it helped me see how Turkishness tries to position itself in Turkey and the Middle East as a localized replica of whiteness, or as the neutral point of observation, which half-heartedly copies its "hubris of the zero point".[11] That is, as defined by the Walter Mignolo, the so-called 'knowing subject', which "maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them".[12] Many of my observations in the second and third sections can be seen as a philosophical contribution to Ünlü's

---

[7] Ünlü, 2018, pp. 13-14
[8] P. 15
[9] Pp. 16-17
[10] Pp. 17-18
[11] Mignolo, 2009, p. 160
[12] Ibid.

sociological findings.[13] Unlike Ünlü's account on Turkishness, however, I will also highlight the asymmetric relationship between the Turkish-Islamic and Western civilization projects.[14] My responses to the above question are partly shaped by my own historico-existential perspective as a Turkish-speaking citizen of Turkey with partly native non-Muslim roots and as a new member of the Anatolian / East Thracian diaspora in Europe.

This study, in other words, is fundamentally based on an understanding of Turkishness that is shaped by my positionality in two 'worlds', which allows me to clearly see the asymmetric relationship between whiteness and Turkishness. In the Netherlands, where I have done the most part of my research, it became much clearer to me that today the Anatolian / East Thracian diaspora in Europe is systematically subjected to institutionalized white supremacist racism, and that Turkishness has been historically perceived in contradistinction to whiteness. Not so long ago, with the arrival of 'guest workers' from Turkey to rebuild European economy and infrastructure shortly after the Second World War, they have been perceived in the neighboring Germany as the new 'lowest of the low'.[15] This racializing attitude to the Anatolian / East Thracian diaspora, mainly the Turks due to their numbers, can be also found in the Netherlands, especially since the early-2000s, where the existence of migrants from Turkey and Morocco have been increasingly problematized under the racist 'burden sharing' discourse in a number of publications by some native Dutch scholars.[16]

I promote here a both political and epistemic understanding of decolonization in the context of Turkey, not only as delinking from 'modern' Western civilization project and its concept of linear time but also as maintaining a radical distance from secondary Eurocentrism rooted in Turkish-Islamic culture, or 'catching up' with the West logic. Thus, I understand *modernization* in non-Western contexts from a decolonial perspective partly in the light of Enrique Dussel who defines *modernity* as

---

[13] It must be noted at this point that the trajectory founded by Ünlü is fundamentally linked with his struggle as a scholar and activist in Turkey who has been among the Academics for Peace Initiative, a group of scholars purged from Turkish academia for their criticism of the state's brutal 'anti-terror' operations in its majority-Kurdish provinces since the end of the peace process with the PKK. Accordingly, I see this study as an opportunity to introduce the findings of Ünlü to a broader academic audience and make a philosophical contribution to them based on my own experience of Turkishness.

[14] It must be noted that Ünlü's understanding of Muslimness and Turkishness as a contract is inspired from Charles Mills' 1997 book *The Racial Contract*, where he analyzes white supremacism and whiteness through the lens of contract as a global phenomenon. Unlike Mills' account, however, Ünlü deals with a more localized form of racism.

[15] See, for instance, Wallraff, G. (1988). *Lowest of the Low*. London: Mandarin.

[16] See, for instance, the works by the Dutch urban political theorist Margo Trappenburg, particularly her controversial 2003 essay "Against Segregation: Ethnic Mixing in Liberal States". *The Journal of Political Philosophy*. Volume 11, Number 3.

a Europe originated "myth", which has been "constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity".[17] The myth of modernity, as Dussel suggests, first appeared when Europe affirmed itself as "the 'center' of a World History", which could not and cannot exist without the so-called non-modern 'periphery'.[18] Unlike the way it has been often conceived in the West as a marker of "a rational 'concept' of emancipation" and of newness, or belonging to the present, Dussel emphasizes that modernity is rather an irrational myth, which fundamentally rests on "a justification for genocidal violence" in the creation and maintenance of the unipolar and capitalist world system centered around the West.[19] Accordingly, I think modernization can be described as another closely related myth, which also fundamentally rests on a justification for genocidal violence. Modernization manifests itself in non-Western and de-westernizing contexts such as Turkey as a so-called marker of newness, and of the affirmation of the possibility to create an alternative center with its own periphery in today's no longer unipolar but still capitalist world system.

On Postcoloniality, Decoloniality, and the Absence of Turkey in the Decolonization Debate:

Before I move on to any broader analysis of Turkish-Islamic 'modern' civilization project, it is necessary to provide an overview of the postcolonial / decolonial debate and find the place of Turkey and other post-Ottoman states in it. Perhaps it is essential to start from Fanon since his works can be located at the beginning of the emergence of both postcolonial and decolonial thinking. Another reason to start from him is the rising interest among some scholars from Turkey in Fanon's concept of decolonization to explain the PKK insurgency.[20] Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* contains many implicit and explicit reflections on Middle Eastern struggles for independence and the rise of revivalist / Pan-nationalist tendencies among colonized intellectuals. To understand better the significance of Fanon in the field, it is crucial to bear in mind that the book was published in a period when the field was largely dominated by Orientalists who promoted such theories as

---

[17] Dussel, 1993, p. 65
[18] Ibid.
[19] Pp. 65-66
[20] One observer from Turkey, for instance, claims that "the PKK redefined Marxism-Leninism with a high dose of Fanonism, emphasizing the creation of decolonized human beings through resistance" (Gürses, 2018, p. 50), while Ünlü suggests that although it is not certain that its leaders read Fanon, the PKK emerged as "a Fanonian movement", because it aims to end the hegemony of the colonizer together with the colonized Kurd which has been oppressed, neglected, and made to be ashamed of Kurdishness (Ünlü, 2018, p.295).

Oriental Despotism and the *Ottoman decline thesis*[21], and that the only major opposition to these theories came from some diaspora Pan-Arabist scholars who tried to prove the existence of an 'indigenous' trajectory of modernity in the Middle East prior to European colonization[22], not unlike the Neo-Ottomanism project in today's Turkey.

Fanon's intervention into Middle Eastern and Islamic studies can be seen as a part of his broader views on Eurocentrism of colonized intellectuals, among which he observes that the debates on the existence or absence of civilization and national culture "represent a special battlefield".[23] This is a battlefield in the domain of culture where the battle is fought against "the colonialist theory of pre-colonial barbarism" and its followers among the colonized intellectuals. Fanon explains the colonialist theory as a set of Eurocentric narratives about a people's pre-colonial past based on "the idea that before the advent of colonialism their history was one which was dominated by barbarism", and that colonialism brought 'light' into their 'darkness'.[24] Colonialist theory is further explained by Fanon as a part of a broader project of colonial domination: the colonial logic not only rests on "holding a people in its grip", it also "turns to the past of an oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it".[25]

Yet, Fanon emphasizes that delinking from the colonialist theory is not an easy and straight-forward task. The colonialist theory is always accompanied by a racist categorization of the world's population based on an understanding of civilizations as monolithic cultural complexes in order to deny culture and civilization among the Black, Arab, or Muslim peoples as a whole.[26] In response to the colonialist theory, he argues, many colonized intellectuals have been developing self-racializing attitudes and desperately trying to demonstrate the existence of a monolithic Arab, Islamic, or Black culture beyond borders, through which they became contributors to the "racialization of thought" in their local contexts.[27] The rise of Pan-nationalisms in various local forms among native intellectuals during and after the independence struggles is explained by Fanon as a clear manifestation of these self-racializing attitudes. These political and intellectual movements are the "antithesis" of the

---

[21] See, for instance, Lewis, B. (1958). "Some Reflections on the Decline of the Ottoman Empire", *Studia Islamica*, No. 9, pp. 111-127
[22] A typical example is Albert Hourani. See Hourani, A. (1957). "The Changing Face of the Fertile Crescent in the XVIIIth Century", *Studia Islamica*, No. 8, pp. 89-122
[23] Fanon, 2001, p. 168
[24] Pp. 168-171
[25] P. 169
[26] Pp. 170-171
[27] Ibid.

colonialist theory and its racist categorization of world's population, and they are "logically inscribed from the same point of view as that of colonialism" even though they actively promote political and cultural de-westernization.[28]

The attempts to form a monolithic continental civilization, according to Fanon, has not amplified the sense of solidarity with other colonized peoples. On the contrary, such projects also incorporate a racist attitude toward other non-Western peoples, which in the case of Africa led to the division of the continent into 'White' Arab-Muslim Africa and 'Black' Sub-Saharan Africa.[29] Among the Arabic-speaking intellectuals of Africa who promote the idea of the revival of Arab-Muslim culture and civilization, for instance, Fanon observes a rising tendency to view the Black Africans of the South as 'uncivilized' and 'savage', whose allegedly non-existent civilization and culture cannot be compared to the North's thousand-year-old ones.[30] Moreover, Fanon claims that colonialism disrupts the development of culture among colonized peoples at every level.[31] Popular armed struggle for the nation's liberation, however, provides a new "material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible" as a collective urban-rural and popular-intellectual enterprise.[32]

The fight for independence, which is necessarily accompanied by the fight for national culture, is explained by Fanon as the first step toward decolonization. National liberation is by no means the end of the fight against colonialism, it only marks a new stage in which the nation starts "to play its part on the stage of history".[33] The aim of decolonization in the Fanonian sense is then not simply political independence for colonized peoples, or a return to the pre-colonial past by the revival of their dead civilizations; it not only aims "the disappearance of colonialism" but also the disappearance of the colonized being altogether.[34] In other words, the idea of decolonization promoted by Fanon "aims at a fundamentally different set of relations" between human beings, which requires a new language to articulate "a new humanism" and a "new humanity" rooted in the diverse cultures of colonized peoples.[35]

---

[28] Ibid.
[29] Pp. 129-130
[30] Ibid.
[31] P. 191
[32] P.187
[33] P. 199
[34] P. 198
[35] Ibid.

Fanon's theory of decolonization based on his observations on the anti-colonial struggles in the Middle East and Africa leaves us with many ambiguities surrounding his overarching category: the national culture. This category overlooks the problem of how borders erected during colonization and after national independence can disrupt cultural ties between indigenous communities, which often create new colonial situations as it can be seen in the cases of Kurds, Assyrians, Druze, and Yezidis. Though it should be noted that Fanon's idea of epistemic decolonization is accompanied by his idea of "political decentralization"[36], or abandoning the Western model of centralized nation-state, but he does not address further how this would guarantee interculturality, or the coexistence of different cultures. It seems that rather than addressing these ambiguities and shortcomings of Fanon's thinking about decolonization as a process that must go further than political independence, postcolonial studies in the late-twentieth century have largely focused on what Fanon formulated as the colonialist theory of pre-colonial barbarism, or racialization by Western thought, of which Edward Said's *Orientalism* can be seen as a prime example.

The multidimensional workings of racism among colonized peoples revealed by Fanon – racialization by Western thought, self-racialization, and racializing other non-Western peoples – briefly appeared once again during the 2000s in the late-postcolonial interventions into Middle Eastern studies. Although it is unclear whether the authors of these studies read Fanon or not, the late-postcolonial interventions into Middle Eastern studies reflect a return to some Fanonian themes by drawing attention to what Selim Deringil called "borrowed colonialism"[37], or what Ussama Makdisi described as "Ottoman Orientalism"[38], accompanied by the late-Ottoman elite's understanding of the Empire as 'the last Muslim stronghold' standing against European colonialism. Makdisi, for instance, observes that the Turkish-Islamic civilization project during the late-Ottoman Empire was characterized by a sharp distinction between the "Muslim modernized self", or the ruling Turkish-Sunni elite in the imperial capital, and the "degraded Oriental self", or the so-called 'unreformed' and 'pre-modern' subjects of the empire.[39] Similarly, Deringil stresses that "as an empire, and a great power, and the only Muslim at that, the Ottomans rejected the subaltern role

---

[36] P. 149
[37] Deringil, 2003, p. 312
[38] Makdisi, 2002, p. 768
[39] P. 770

that the West seemed intent on making them adopt, but they could only do this by inviting (to put it euphemistically) 'their own' subalterns into history".[40]

But as the Greek scholar Vangelis Kechriotis rightly puts it, the late-postcolonial interventions into Middle Eastern studies, particularly the works by Makdisi and Deringil, were "claiming in scholarship what the Ottomans themselves never managed to achieve in politics": they tried to locate the late-Ottoman Empire horizontally on the same historical-analytical space with the European overseas colonial empires of the same period.[41] In other words, these studies could not make enough sense of the asymmetries between the Turkish-Islamic and Western civilization projects. But more importantly, they were formulated from a largely Arab-centric perspective and only focused on how Arabness was subordinated under Turkishness in a time that Pan-Islamism was gaining prominence in Ottoman politics. As a consequence, they largely overlooked how the late-Ottoman experience of colonialism affected intercommunal relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Ottoman society and how these relationships radically changed in the course of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.[42]

In a word, further studies on manifestations of Turkishness in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey must not overlook some aspects peculiar to the late-Ottoman experience of colonialism, in which, as Kechriotis puts it, "the ruler and the ruled, the colonizer and the colonized, the dominant and the subaltern, were continuously changing roles".[43] Although Kechriotis himself does not engage with such broader theoretical issues in postcolonial theory, the argument that I extract from his critique on the shortcomings of the postcolonial interventions into Ottoman / Turkish studies is that there is a necessity pay more attention to the coexistence of diverse local histories, cultures, and different experiences of colonial domination under both the Ottoman Empire and the Republic. The analytic tools for such an examination of cultural history, or histories, of Turkey and other post-

---

[40] Deringil, 2003, p. 342
[41] Kechriotis, 2013, p. 41
[42] Pp. 43-44. Here Kechriotis gives the example of "capitulations" in the nineteenth century, which were often put to work to protect some non-Muslim Ottoman communities. Some members of these communities, he adds, had exceptionally high positions in the Ottoman hierarchy "through profiting from the presence of other colonial powers", and "managed to partially avoid being monitored by the Ottoman authorities", which would change especially in the aftermath of 1908 Young Turks Revolution.
[43] P. 43. It is clear that he is making this observation regarding the late-Ottoman experience of internal colonialism as he later writes as follows: "One has to bear in mind that we are referring to nineteenth-century colonial experience and not to fifteenth century territorial expansion".

Ottoman contexts seem to be only provided by decolonial thought with its emphasis on *coloniality* rather than *colonialism*, and on interculturality rather than a monolithic national culture.

Decolonial thinkers often stress that there have been major discontinuities between postcoloniality and decoloniality. Walter Mignolo argues, for instance, that unlike postcoloniality, decoloniality has not emerged "within the linear narrative of modernity according to which the 'post' signals the anxiety for novelty".[44] Postcoloniality, according to Mignolo, is a part of "the mutation (metamorphosis) from modernity to postmodernity", which "took place within the parameters of the western 'civilizing mission'".[45] Decoloniality, by contrast, aims "to delink from the single story of modernity" based on the presupposition that "there is no modernity without coloniality".[46] Instead of pursuing paradigmatic changes within the parameters of Western civilizing mission, decoloniality deals with "modernity becoming 'trans' rather than 'post' in the sense that is confronted with other languages, religions, and histories that take it beyond the Greco-Roman and Christian legacies".[47]

The term coloniality was first formulated by Anibal Quijano to explain a matrix of power and its role in the emergence and maintenance of the Europe-centered capitalist world order, which "has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established".[48] As a product of the sixteenth century European colonial expansion, according to Quijano, coloniality has been functioning in two main axes and played a major role in their maintenance: one is "the codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered" along racial lines, and the other is "the constitution of a new structure of control of labor and its resources and products".[49] Shortly after Quijano, Walter Mignolo coined the conceptual frame modernity / coloniality as an extension of Quijano's understanding of coloniality. Coloniality, on the one hand, is explained by Mignolo as "the hidden agenda" or "the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, although downplayed, dimension."[50]

---

[44] Mignolo, 2013, p. 111
[45] P. 115
[46] P. 110
[47] P. 116
[48] Quijano, 2000, p. 533
[49] Pp. 533-534
[50] Mignolo, 2011, p. 2

Modernity, one the other hand, is explained as a rhetoric or a myth, which cannot exist without its darker side: coloniality.[51]

Then, Mignolo suggests, although modernity / coloniality is a product of Western culture and its civilizing mission, it is no longer peculiar to the Global North or the West in today's multipolar world: "[I]f there cannot be modernity without coloniality, there cannot either be global modernities without global colonialities".[52] That is to say, what has been commonly manifested today as "global modernities", according to Mignolo, means nothing but "global colonialities".[53] The idea of multiple modernities emerging all over the globe, therefore, implies that unlike the past four hundred years "the colonial matrix of power is shared and disputed by many contenders".[54] In parallel with Fanon's critique of de-westernization, the notion of global colonialities put forward by Mignolo can be seen as a critique of the celebratory articulations of multiple modernities in the multipolar world. To see the connection better, it is crucial to introduce two other related concepts introduced by decolonial thinkers, which can be seen as a further contribution of decolonial thinking to the Fanonian trajectory of decolonization: *pluriversality* and *plurinationality*.

Pluriversality and plurinationality have recently become central concepts in decolonial thought. According to Mignolo, decolonial thinking and praxis which aim to delink from Western civilizing mission and its so-called universality must also aim to delink from other mono-cultural and centralizing civilization or nation-state projects. Pluriversality is described by Mignolo as a decolonial project based on the rejection of all universalizing global order designs, which are "monocentric, universal, and endorse the imperiality of objectivity and truth without parenthesis".[55] The emergence of a decolonial pluriversality from today's multipolar world could allow different temporalities to coexist, which have been "kept hostage by the Western idea of time" and by "the belief that there is one single temporality".[56] Decolonial pluriversality does not necessarily imply the negation of Western or any other knowledge system as a whole. It does, however, imply that Western thought and history must be considered as parts of the pluriverse together with other local histories and knowledge systems.[57]

---

[51] Ibid.
[52] P. 3
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] P. 23
[56] Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, p. 3
[57] Ibid.

On a more local level, Catherine Walsh argues that decolonization must be accompanied by political decentralization based on a decolonial conceptualization of the notions of interculturality and plurinationality. As opposed to Western multiculturalism, or "functional interculturality", which has been pacifying and demobilizing anti-colonial struggles and forming "a more complex mode of domination", decolonial interculturality aims to make visible the "lived legacies and long horizons of domination, oppression, exclusion, and colonial difference".[58] The principle of decolonial interculturality, according to Walsh, is rooted in the Latin American indigenous struggles for building plurinational states as a model for political organization based on what she describes as "the frame of equality of rights, mutual respect, peace, and harmony among nationalities and peoples".[59] But the making of a plurinational state is not always a decolonial project as it can be seen in some affluent Western countries such as Canada and New Zealand, where plurinationality is rooted in the principle of functional interculturality. Unlike these cases, Walsh argues, decolonial plurinationality must involve "a radical alteration of historical conflicts, of power relations, or of the dominant, modern, colonial, and Western state model".[60]

As I have tried to show above, the recent decolonial formulations of pluriversality and plurinationality, which emerged partly as a product of Latin American indigenous struggles, can be seen as further contributions to the Fanonian trajectory of epistemic and political decolonization, and as attempts to resolve the ambiguities surrounding his notion of national culture. But it seems clear to me that Turkey has been largely absent in the debates on decolonization from Fanon to the first-generation decolonial thinkers. Turkey only appeared recently in these debates as a former candidate for EU membership, which then under Erdoğan's rule "promptly turned the tables, opting to follow the dewesternizing trajectories of East / South East Asia and the Middle East instead".[61] Until now, they have hardly paid any attention to the late-Ottoman colonial racism, genocides and their lived legacies under the Republic and other post-Ottoman states. Recently, however, some decolonial researchers from other parts of the world have been drawing attention to the manifestations of modernity / coloniality beyond the parameters of the Western civilization project without overlooking their asymmetric relationship with the West.

---

[58] Walsh, 2018, pp. 57-58
[59] P. 60
[60] P. 61
[61] Mignolo, 2013, p. 112

According to Madina Tlostanova, Russia is a paradigmatic example of a 'quasi-Western' and 'second-class' empire characterized by its "external imperial difference", which has never managed to affirm itself as an equal of its Western rivals.[62] Tlostanova, on the one hand, observes that Russia still bears the legacy of being the heir of "a racialized empire" allowing "Western philosophy, knowledge, and culture to colonize itself", which led to its own knowledge systems to be shaped by a secondary Eurocentrism, or "catching-up logic".[63] On the other hand, Russia positioned itself as "the caricature 'civilizer' in its non-European colonies", projecting "its own inferiority complexes onto its colonies through its self-proclaimed modernizer and civilizer role".[64] I think the self-racializing 'catching up' logic and the caricature 'civilizer' role that Tlostanova observes in Russia can be also found in the context of Turkey as the heir of the Ottoman Empire, which she explains as another second-class empire "marked by its external imperial difference", this time a "quasi-Muslim" one. [65]

Perhaps Tlostanova's remarks can be further expanded by reminding that the conquest of Ottoman imperial capital under the pretext of 'liberating' Tsargrad and Ottoman Christians had been articulated by many Pan-Slavist Russian intellectuals, such as Nikolay Danilevsky and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, as a fundamental part of the Russian civilization project in the late-nineteenth century and its mission of catching up with Western civilization.[66] Similarly, in the writings of such Pan-Turkist intellectuals as Yusuf Akçura and Ziya Gökalp, where structural Turkism was articulated for the first time before the foundation of the Republic, one can see that the idea of 'liberating' Turkic Muslim peoples from the Russian Empire had been conceived as an integral part of Turkish-Islamic civilization project. In other words, the ruling and intellectual elite in both Russian and Ottoman Empires similarly had to deal with an immense inferiority complex and saw the defeat of the other as the ultimate precondition to catch up with the West in civilizational terms. Obviously, the Russian and Ottoman Empires are no longer alive, but the legacies of the state-civilization projects flourished under both empires are increasingly becoming more visible in today's multipolar world,

---

[62] Tlostanova, 2015, p. 268
[63] Pp. 271-272
[64] P. 272
[65] P. 268
[66] See, for instance, both authors' considerations on the so-called 'Eastern Question' in Danilevsky, N (2013) *Russia and Europe: The Slavic World's Political and Cultural Relations with the Germanic-Roman West* and Dostoyevsky, F (2009) *A Writer's Diary.*

which require closer attention from decolonial researchers. This reveals the urgency to start thinking about decolonization differently and more radically in the context of Turkey and beyond.

On Structural Islamism, Structural Turkism, and Dispensable Lives in 'Modern' Turkish-Islamic Thought:

Since the second half of the twentieth century, a large number of scholars have been dismissing the Eurocentric presuppositions about the cultural histories of the Middle East that European overseas colonial expansion brought civilization and culture to an allegedly static region where "the gate of interpretation", or *ijtihad*, was permanently closed under Turkish dominance.[67] With his 1957 essay "The Changing Face of the Fertile Crescent", Albert Hourani became one of the first scholars from the Middle East who dismissed this way of thinking about the region, which Fanon would describe as a clear example of the colonialist theory of pre-colonial barbarism. According to Hourani, what was rather behind the "violent break-up of the old 'natural' communities" of the Middle East in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the arrival of a foreign idea: Western type nationalism "on an ethnic rather than territorial basis".[68] Although scholars from Turkey rarely promoted epistemic and political de-westernization in the most part of the late-twentieth century, things have begun to change since Erdoğan came to power in 2002.

For the past two decades, the current ruling and intellectual elite in Turkey have been promoting a new narrative of Turkey's cultural history in parallel with the earlier critiques of the decline thesis, in which they increasingly draw attention to the Kemalist Revolution of 1923 as a break from the native Turkish-Islamic culture. Kemal Karpat, for instance, claims that Turkish language and culture flourished rather than declined under Islam since the eleventh century, because Islam allowed non-Arabic cultures and languages to thrive insofar as they belong to the members of the *ummah*. Since the early years of Islam, he adds, belonging to *ummah* "superseded, without undermining or destroying, membership in a linguistic ethnic group, as the loyalties required for the two memberships were not in conflict – at least not until the introduction of Western type

---

[67] This infamous view is promoted by a number of prominent European Orientalists since the nineteenth century. See, for instance, von Hammer-Purgstall, J. (1827) *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, Budapest: Hartleben, and Gibb, H. & Bowen, H. (1957) *Islamic Society ad the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilization on Moslem Culture in the Near East*, London: Oxford University Press.
[68] Hourani, 1957, p. 121

nationalism which gave priority to ethnicity and language and made them the basis of political organization".[69]

The introduction of Western type nationalism, according to Karpat, was at the heart of the development of the Kemalist policy of "total national independence", which led to a radical break from Turkish-Islamic culture by legitimizing the elimination of all Arabic and Persian influence from Turkish language and culture. The idea of total national independence is then explained by Karpat as a marker of the emergence of a "xenophobic" and "isolationist" attitude among the Kemalist elite of the new Republic towards non-Turkish communities of the *ummah* as well as their own Turkish-Islamic culture.[70] Was this really the case? Or was Kemalism rather an episode in the Ottoman-Turkish civilizing mission that amplified or gave a new form and primacy to the already existing racial philosophy rooted in Islamic systems of knowledge under the influence of European narratives of modernity? To be clear, the de-westernizing trajectory founded by Hourani can be seen as a crucial contribution to studies on the Middle East, which played a major role in the decanonization of the infamous Ottoman decline thesis in a time that Western civilization had been largely accepted as *the* civilization by local and diaspora Middle Eastern scholars. Yet, I think, in today's multipolar world it is time to also move beyond the conviction that racial thinking and racism have no history in the Middle East prior to the impact of 'modern' Western thought without overlooking the differences between medieval and modern / colonial articulations of race in Islamic systems of knowledge.

Providing answers to the above questions have critical importance in any critical-decolonial investigation of the Turkish-Islamic 'civilizing' mission and its role in the late-Ottoman genocides. Yet, to be able to answer these questions, it is necessary to consider a broader epistemic landscape than Turkey and have a closer look at the dominant narratives of civilization in the Middle East before the arrival of the myth of modernity and the logic of coloniality into these regions. Scholars who previously compared various notions of civilization being widely used today in Muslim-majority countries from Turkey to Malaysia, such as *hadarah*, *tamaddun*, and *madaniyyah*, often highlight that these terms are all derived from Arabic. Badrane Benlahcene, for example, observes that all three variations originally meant sedentary life, which gained this particular meaning in the early years of Islam. In the early Islamic theology and history, the Prophet Mohammed's migration to Medina and

[69] Karpat, 2004, pp. 441-442
[70] P. 458

his reconstruction of Medina into a city were seen as markers of "a new civilizing process and new civilizational entity", which led to the transformation of "the culture of people from Bedouin, tribal paganism into a civil ideational Islamic culture".[71]

This widely acknowledged understanding of civilization went through two major transformations, first in the thirteenth and then in the nineteenth centuries. Before the "first confrontations with modern Europe" and the rise of "Islamic revivalism" in the nineteenth century, which led many Muslim scholars, scientists, and activists to reinterpret the term civilization, Benlahcene rightfully draws attention to Ibn-Khaldūn's thirteenth century book *Muqaddimah* as the first systematic theorization of an "Islamic concept of civilization".[72] What has been largely neglected by scholars who promote political and cultural de-westernization in the Middle East, however, is that one can find in *Muqaddimah* not only the first systematic theory of civilization, but also the first systematic racial philosophy rooted in Islamic cultures, albeit in a pre-capitalist form. The conflation of racial and civilizational thinking in *Muqaddimah*, as I will try to show here, was not coincidental. Instead, Ibn-Khaldūn's cyclical understanding of the rise and decline of civilizations was highly influenced by his racial philosophy.[73] The racial thinking of Ibn-Khaldūn and his understanding of the parts of the world where civilizations can emerge rests on a sharp distinction between *temperate* and *intemperate* zones. In his scheme, whether a community is dwelling within the boundaries of temperate or intemperate zones determine their conditions, such as its members' capacity for civilized life or servitude, whether its belief systems pass as a religion or not, and even its members' skin color.

The temperate zone is explained by Ibn-Khaldūn as the cultivated parts of the Northern Hemisphere where sedentary life is possible. Its inhabitants have "all the natural conditions necessary for a civilized life", including crafts and sciences, cities, laws, and religions.[74] Outside this region, civilization is impossible, because the inhabitants of intemperate zones, in his case Black and Slavic peoples, are "removed from being temperate in all their conditions"[75]. Ibn-Khaldūn describes the inhabitants of the intemperate zones as lacking religion and living in "savage isolation" with few

---

[71] Benlahcene, 2017, p. 46
[72] P. 47
[73] It is crucial to bear in mind the social and political context under which *Muqaddimah* was written. The book was written in a period that Muslim Arabs remained as the dominant force in the slave trade of Black Africans, while some of their former Turkic slaves formed dynasties and became the overlords of Arabs in many parts of the region today known as the Middle East.
[74] Ibn-Khaldūn, 2015, p. 61
[75] P. 58

exceptions such as the Mali Kingdom in the south and some European Christian peoples in the north where monotheism is found. Besides these few exceptions, the conditions of inhabitants of the intemperate zones are explained by Ibn-Khaldūn as "submissive to slavery", because for him they had "little that is essentially human".[76] Another aspect of Ibn-Khaldūn's racial philosophy is revealed in his discussion on the rise and decline of Abbasid civilization. According to Ibn-Khaldūn, Bedouin tribes before Islam were in "a state of savagery" and "by nature remote from royal leadership".[77] With the arrival of Islam, however, "their nature has undergone a complete transformation" which led "the Bedouins to have a restraining influence on themselves".[78]

Yet, one of the main reasons that led to the decline of the civilization of sedentary Arabs, Ibn-Khaldūn suggests, was not "preserving the purity of lineage of their families and groups", or their intermixing with Persians and other non-Arabs they conquered.[79] The Abbasid civilization declined before it "reached senility", because its group feeling declined as its royal authority rested on the inclusion of "its clients", particularly the Turks. This inclusion, according to Ibn-Khaldūn, gave rise to "another royal authority", which he considers as "inferior to that of the controlling royal authority".[80] Yet, Ibn-Khaldūn argues that such conditions do not exist among the Bedouin tribes of the desert. The Bedouin tribes are the basis of any sedentary Arab civilization to reemerge, and the desert in which they live is explained as "the basis and reservoir of civilization and cities" founded by Arabs.[81] The "toughness of desert life" that shaped the conditions of Bedouin tribes "precedes the softness of sedentary life".[82] Although he articulates sedentary life as "the goal to which the Bedouin aspires", this also marks "the last stage of civilization and the point where it begins to decay".[83] Therefore, Bedouin tribes who returned to the desert have more prospect to form a new civilization and to "being good" than sedentary Arabs.[84]

Ibn-Khaldūn's theory of civilization is illuminating in the sense that it reflects how racial thinking can be found in the medieval Islamic systems of thought and it is not strictly borrowed from Europe together with the myth of modernity. In other words, his observations on non-

---

[76] P. 117
[77] P. 121
[78] Ibid.
[79] Pp. 99-100
[80] P. 108
[81] P. 93
[82] Ibid.
[83] Pp. 93-94
[84] P. 94

monotheistic peoples, especially those of Sub-Saharan Africa, show that Islamic cultures in the pre-capitalist poly-centric world were not immune from racist categorization of world's population. Some decolonial thinkers such as Sylvia Wynter previously drew attention to the similarities between the constructions of Blackness in the medieval Islamic systems of knowledge and those in Europe at the beginning of its colonial expansion and claimed that both cases followed similar "rules of representation" and "operational strategies".[85] Yet, the Islamic constructions of race and the lived legacies of Muslim slave trade of Black Africans which lasted until the twentieth century have been largely neglected by most decolonial thinkers just as much as scholars in Middle Eastern studies as a result of the history that has unfolded ever since and the emergence of the capitalist Europe-centered world system, under which the slave trade of Africans was largely taken over from Muslims, transformed, and expanded by Europeans. But as some observers note, unlike the lived legacies of trans-Atlantic slave trade in Americas, among numerous Ottoman successor states only in Sudan the Ottoman slave trade had a major impact on the collective memory of large parts of the society.[86]

Although there is much to learn from examining the similarities and differences between the constructions of race in pre-capitalist Islam and Christianity, what I am more concerned at this point is how race was transformed into an overarching category in the Ottoman-Turkish systems of knowledge prior to the emergence of Kemalism and started to function as a tool in the construction of economic and legally / politically dispensable lives. According to Mignolo, economic and legal / political dispensability of lives were the two most devastating consequences of modernity / coloniality, initially appeared in the sixteenth century as "a Western theological construction at the confluence of the expulsion of Moors and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula and the colonization of the New World which brought Indians and Black Africans into the picture".[87] Mignolo observes in the European colonial expansion an almost simultaneous emergence of the economic and legal / political dispensability of lives, which not only involved slavery or servitude as seen in the case of Black Africans but also genocide and mass displacement of whole populations as seen in the cases of indigenous peoples in the New World and later Jews during *Shoah*. What distinguishes the modern / colonial constructions of race from earlier ones, in other words, is coloniality as the hidden logic behind the unipolar capitalist world system which has provided "legitimacy to constant processes of

---

[85] Wynter, 1995, pp. 20-21
[86] Walz & Cuno, 2010, pp. 1-2
[87] Mignolo, 2009, p.72

racialization" and made "human lives dispensable under the progressive and never-ending face of economic growth and capital accumulation".[88]

In a word, Mignolo rightfully dismisses the Eurocentrism in previous studies on dehumanizing racism by Western scholars, exemplified by such thinkers as Giorgio Agamben and Hannah Arendt, and he proposes a shift in the geography of reasoning by drawing attention to the links between Reconquista, trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonial genocide of indigenous peoples, and *Shoah*. Yet, Mignolo's account seems to have its own shortcomings as he leaves the Ottoman Empire out of this scheme by making an overgeneralizing distinction between "imperial capitalist" and "subaltern" forms of racism[89]. I think his notions of economic and legal / political dispensability of lives, nonetheless, can be well applied to the late-Ottoman / Turkish case, particularly from the late nineteenth century onwards. As I have tried to show earlier, medieval Muslim intellectuals such as Ibn-Khaldūn already developed a pre-capitalist notion of enslavable peoples. But it would be a mistake to consider Ibn-Khaldūn's work as an Arab-supremacist manifesto in the modern / colonial sense of the term. His idea of race, to begin with, was not an overarching category, which did not enable Muslim rulers to enslave, subjugate, or annihilate entire populations in the name of Islam, Arab-Islamic civilization, or economic growth. Therefore, an Ibn-Khaldūnian framework of race alone is not enough to explain how race as an epistemic category was instrumentalized in the justification of legal / political dispensability of lives in the Ottoman Empire in later periods, for which it is crucial to have a closer look at the intellectual transformations in the Ottoman Empire prior to the 1915 genocidal campaign.

As some Turkish observers inspired by postcolonial studies have already stressed, with the arrival of European narratives of modernity and progress in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman-Turkish intellectual and ruling elite's attitudes toward the Empire's tribal and nomadic population would dramatically change. This change, according to Reşat Kasaba, was accompanied by a whole new interpretation of Ibn-Khaldūn's partly idealizing and partly antagonistic attitude to nomadic tribes and the idea they borrowed from Ibn-Khaldūn that the relationship between tribes and urban civilizations are "fundamentally conflictual".[90] Similarly, Selim Deringil argues that in the late-nineteenth century, particularly during the reign of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), Ottoman elite

---

[88] P. 76
[89] Pp. 81-82
[90] Kasaba, 2009, p. 7

combined the "classical Ibn Khaldounian view that all civilization advances as a confrontation of nomadism with settled life" with the concept of *mission civilizatrice* which "the Ottomans took right out of the *Troisième Republique*".[91] With the emphasis on Ibn-Khaldūn, both authors highlight something clear; that is, as Deringil puts it, rather than being established on a *tabula rasa,* the Ottoman-Turkish "drive to achieve modernity" incorporated "a whole grab bag of concepts, methods, and tools of statecraft that had been filtered down the ages", including Ibn-Khaldūn's racial philosophy.[92]

What was new in the Ottoman civilizing mission during the Hamidian and Young Turks' rule, according to Deringil, was the conflation of "the ideas of modernity and colonialism", and the beginning of the transformation of Anatolia / Eastern Thrace into a homogenized, mono-cultural "core region" as opposed to the Empire's colonial periphery.[93] Deringil further observes that the idea of colonialism emerged in the final quarter of the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was accompanied by the idea of a civilized or "modern way of being" in contrast with the Empire's non-Turkish but Muslim subjects.[94] Yet, once we bring non-Muslims into the picture, we have a more complicated story. According to Ünlü, the Hamidian state aimed to harmonize the popular Muslim sensibilities from below and the rise of Islamism among middle-class Muslims under a modern state project and a Muslimness contract based on the Sunni-Hanafi doctrine of the Caliphate.[95] Muslimness contract, or structural Islamism, that emerged in this period, as Ünlü argues, was not strictly a top-down implemented political structure. It rather transformed the sense of resentment and revenge toward non-Muslims from below into an institutionalized form of racism under a modern state project.[96]

Starting with the 1895-1896 Armenian pogroms, which had been the prelude of the upcoming genocidal campaign, one of the key roles of Hamidian state in the emergence and maintenance of Muslimness contract was to turn a blind eye to the local Turkish, Kurdish, and Arab perpetrators in the aftermath of their massacres.[97] What has broader philosophical significance here as emphasized by Ünlü is that from 1890s until the collapse of the Empire "the Muslim center

---

[91] Deringil, 2003, p. 317
[92] P. 312
[93] Ibid.
[94] P. 313
[95] Ünlü, 2018, p. 91
[96] Pp. 96-97
[97] P. 97

found the reflection of itself in the periphery, while the Muslim periphery found the reflection of itself in the center".[98] The desired goal that had been shared between the Muslim center and Muslim periphery was simply the erasure of all Christian Orthodox existence within the Empire's borders. Therefore, Ünlü adds, Muslimness contract functioned in a way that it brought the center and periphery together and made them horizontally complicit in "a crime that had not been perceived as a crime".[99] In the light of Ünlü, I think the Young Turks' ideologue Ziya Gökalp's account on the Empire's non-Muslim subjects shortly before the 1915 genocidal campaign started can be read in terms of how the Ottoman-Turkish intellectuals in the imperial capital were also complicit in the functioning and maintenance of Muslimness contract:

> The majority of the Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgarians living among us have readily accepted the manners and habits of European civilization. Because of the existence of certain conditions peculiar to our life, we Muslims could not imitate the ready-made norms of Europe and its standard ways of living. […] Our non-Muslim compatriots are only anxious imitators of European life. We, as I have explained, should create a new synthesis. We certainly shall seek, discover, and appropriate the genuine values. The belief that they are in a more favorable position as compared to ours is therefore nothing but a pseudo-truth."[100]

It can be clearly seen in this passage from the 1911 essay "New Life and New Values" by Gökalp, that prior to the genocidal campaign of 1915, the Ottoman-Turkish ruling and intellectual elite made a clear distinction between the so-called 'genuine' modern-self, or what they saw in Europe's present and in Islam's future, and what they conceived as the 'imitation' of European modernity in the Empire's non-Muslim communities. That is to say, Gökalp's account on non-Muslims reflects that the creation of the so-called Muslim modern-self fundamentally rested on Muslimness contract, or the systematic exclusion of all the so-called non-genuine elements from the Ottoman political life. But more importantly, it also shows that the first systematic genocidal campaign in the history of Islam rested on a complex set of attitudes to non-Muslims, which combined the 'pre-modern' feelings of religious superiority with 'modern' feelings of civilizational inferiority. Moreover, Gökalp's concluding words in the essay reveals that the search for an

---

[98] P. 98
[99] Pp. 98-99
[100] Gökalp, 1959, pp. 59-60

alternative contract was already beginning to shape as a part of the Young Turks' agenda: "We shall create a genuine civilization, a Turkish civilization".[101]

But as Ünlü further observes, the rise of Turkishness contract, or structural Turkism, from Muslimness contract and the subsequent conflation of both were not that straight-forward. Although there had been earlier calls for a narrower contract, such as Yusuf Akçura's famous 1904 essay "Three Kinds of Politics", the Young Turks elite including Gökalp largely maintained Muslimness contract intact, or at least they were trying to frame their new Turkism-Islamism-Modernism synthesis as an inclusive model that can "fulfill the demands and expectations of all Ottoman Muslims".[102] Accordingly, Gökalp provides a clear picture of this complex state of affairs in his 1914 essay "Nation and Fatherland": "the Ottoman state is a Muslim state – that is, it is formed of Muslim nations. Two great nations, the Turks and the Arabs, by their numbers as well as by their culture and learning, served as the bases of the Ottoman state in such a way that the Ottoman state might even be called a Turkish-Arab state".[103] It should, however, be also noted that Gökalp promotes centralizing and assimilationist policies in the same essay in order to eliminate the cultural and linguistic differences in the long-term with other non-Turkish but Muslim communities: "the Pomaks now speaking Bulgarian and Cretan Muslims now speaking Greek may learn Turkish in the future and cease to be Bulgarian or Greek-speaking peoples".[104]

Despite the clear signs of the hegemonic articulations of Turkishness in this period, this complex state of affairs based on the primacy of Muslimness contract over Turkishness contract continued during the most part of the War of Independence, at least until the 1923 Kemalist Revolution. Between 1912 and 1922, when the state found itself in a "struggle for life and death", as Ünlü observes, both the Young Turks and Kemalist elite could not openly manifest the primacy of Turkishness over Muslimness and distance non-Turkish Muslims from the struggle.[105] That is to say, both the genocidal campaign during WWI and the War of Independence were organized around Muslimness contract, which maintained the harmony between the Muslim center and Muslim

---

[101] P. 60
[102] P. 122
[103] Gökalp, 1959, p. 78
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ünlü, 2018, pp. 123-124

periphery not only through shared interests and struggle for survival but also through shared feelings towards non-Muslims, such as resentment and fear.[106]

The victory in the War of Independence, according to Ünlü, was primarily a victory of the Muslimness contract, during which the 1921 Constitution ratified that the new state beginning to form in Anatolia was pluralist and inclusivist to all Muslims and was ready to give local autonomy to all of its provinces based on a grassroots Muslim democracy.[107] This can be also seen in the considerations of Mustafa Kemal regarding the question of Kurdish autonomy under the new state several months before the foundation of the Republic in 1923: "[O]ur municipal administration law will guarantee the formation of local autonomies. Therefore, any county that has Kurdish inhabitants, people will be governing themselves".[108] But following the foundation of the new Republic and the formalization of eliminating Orthodox Christian existence in Anatolia with the Greek-Turkish population exchange, Ünlü observes that the new ruling and intellectual elite transformed the Muslimness contract into a much narrower form: it was no longer enough to be a Muslim in order to live a safe and privileged life in Turkey, one must also be a Turk, or a Turkified Sunni-Muslim.[109]

Structural Turkism, or Turkishness contract, according to Ünlü, was institutionalized in the domain of state for the first time with the 1924 Constitution of the Kemalist Republic. With this document, the horizontal and negotiating character of Muslimness contract has been abandoned in parallel with the replacement of the principle of *adem-i merkeziyetçilik* (decentralization) by *merkeziyetçilik* (centralization).[110] Thus, the 1924 Constitution was the first manifestation of a distinction between Turkishness in the sense of being a Turkish citizen and Turkishness as something far beyond a notion of citizenship; that is, an all-pervasive but invisible structure that has become the key to politics in Turkey ever since.[111] But Ünlü later emphasizes that the rise of Turkishness contract in the early days of the Republic have not made Muslimness socially and politically insignificant. Instead, Muslimness – or more specifically, belonging to the Sunni-Hanafi

---

[106] P. 124
[107] Pp. 153-154
[108] Atatürk, 2019, p. 87
[109] Pp. 163-164
[110] Ünlü, 2018, p. 166
[111] Pp. 166-167

branch of Islam – would transform under the Kemalist regime into the ultimate precondition for passing as a Turk.[112]

Before ending this section, I would like to make some final remarks regarding Ünlü's use of the term contract, through which he refers to the invisible and all-pervasive structures hidden behind the Ottoman and Turkish centralized and mono-cultural 'modern' state projects from their first appearance in the final quarter of the nineteenth century until the late-2010s. As I have stressed during my earlier discussion on Ünlü, he uses the term contract as a metaphor to explain these invisible and all-pervasive structures from a sociologist's perspective. But it is unclear in Ünlü's account when exactly Turkishness started to function in a similar way to Muslimness in the sense that it brought the center and periphery into a harmony through shared interests and feelings toward those who resisted Turkification, primarily the Kurds. From a critical-decolonial perspective, nonetheless, Ünlü's account reveals something of crucial importance: both the late-Ottoman and Turkish political cultures were shaped by racist political structures, and neither one emerged essentially from below nor top-down implemented by the center. Instead, the 1915 genocidal campaign and its later expansion to non-Turkish Muslims brought the center and periphery together around a racist structure which can only be explained through the modern / colonial sense of racism and racial thinking. Accordingly, Fanon observes a similar all-pervasive and invisible racist structure behind white supremacism in places under European colonial domination:

> "If these poor Whites hate the Blacks it's not, as Monsieur Mannoni implies, because 'racialism is the work of petty officials, small traders, and colonials, who have toiled much without great success'. No, it's because the structure of South Africa is a racist structure".[113]

In the light of Fanon and Ünlü, the all-pervasive and hidden structures behind both forms of racism can be described as two distinct manifestations of modernity / coloniality, which brought the imperial center and colonial periphery into a harmony in their attitudes to racialized others. That is to say, what seems to have much broader significance for the political culture in the late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey than the borrowing of the idea or myth of modernity was the borrowing of the logic of coloniality as a constitutive element of modernity, which manifested itself most clearly in the

---

[112] Pp. 167-168. It is important to note that here Ünlü also draws attention to the case of Karamanlides people of Central Anatolia (a Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christian community), who were deported to Greece as a part of the 1923 Greek-Turkish population exchange agreement.
[113] Fanon, 2008, p. 68

construction of legally / politically dispensable lives. First in the late-Ottoman genocides of Ottoman Christian Orthodox population, and later in the project of eliminating Kurdish culture from Anatolia, the Turkish-Islamic mono-cultural state-civilization project remained uninterrupted and was carried on under both the Ottoman and Turkish centralized and mono-cultural state projects.

On 'Catching Up' With the West and the "Coloniality of Contemporaneity":

In parallel with Tlostanova's observations in the context of Russia, the self-racializing idea of catching up with the West based on the Western concept of linear time can be also seen as one of the main characteristics of modernity / coloniality in its particularly Turkish-Islamic form. Turkish ruling and intellectual elite have been similarly projecting their own inferiority complexes onto their colonies, which played a crucial role in how they positioned themselves as caricature civilizers in the Empire's and Republic's periphery. In this final and short section before I conclude this study, I will address the self-racializing character of Turkishness and Muslimness and try to examine the implications of the 'catching up logic', or the idea of becoming 'contemporary' with the West. Firstly, we must take a brief look at Gökalp's famous account on 'catching up' with the West or becoming 'contemporary' with it:

> "Those peoples are 'contemporary' who make and use all those machines made and used by the peoples most advanced in the techniques of the age. For us today modernization [being contemporary with modern civilization] means to make and use the battleships, cars, and aeroplanes that the Europeans are making and using. […] When we see ourselves no longer in need of importing manufactured goods and buying knowledge from Europe, then we can speak of being contemporary with it".[114]

In this passage from Gökalp's 1913 essay "Three Currents of Thought", it can be seen that the term *muasır*, or contemporary, is articulated as a synonym for being modern. Thus, modernization is understood by Gökalp as becoming contemporary with the West rather than becoming Western. Gökalp as a leading ideologue of Young Turks movement, in other words, understood the late-Ottoman Empire as a not-yet-contemporary state and civilization, which

---

[114] Gökalp, 1959, pp. 75-76

allegedly did not belong to the present. To be clear, Gökalp's account is not the only major example of this way of thinking and the intersection between the politics of time and the politics of modernity in the late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey. After he became known as "Atatürk", or the father of the Turks, Mustafa Kemal would draw a similar parallel in the famous 1933 speech that he delivered on the tenth-year anniversary of the foundation of the Republic: "We are going to advance our country to the level of the most prosperous and the most civilized countries of the world. […] We shall attempt to raise our national culture above the level of contemporary civilization."[115] But what can be further said about this intersection between the politics of time and the politics of modernity on a broader level?

As I have tried to highlight several times throughout this study, decolonial thinkers such as Mignolo promote the idea of maintaining a radical distance from the Western concept of linear time. But the notions of 'catching up' logic and contemporaneity and how they relate to modernity / coloniality have not been clear enough in the works of most decolonial scholars. Rolando Vazquez can be seen as an exception here, who argues that the notions of contemporary and contemporaneity are "perpetuating modernity's politics of time and reproducing the colonial difference" by exercising "power over the definition of the now", and by "instrumenting a separation between those who belong to the now of contemporaneity and those that are relegated to its pastness".[116] Thus, "coloniality of contemporaneity" implies an understanding of the contemporary as "a form of temporal classification", and of "discrimination" and "exclusion", in which the "other is defined as its pastness, as being outside modernity's proper place".[117]

What has been yet overlooked by Vazquez is that the idea of becoming contemporary with the West and the self-affirmation of being the closest to be contemporary with the West in a specific non-Western context can also have devastating effects on racialized others. As I have tried to show in the earlier section, the so-called Turkish civilizing mission tried and was successful in eliminating its most pressing intrinsic contradiction by eliminating the large parts of its non-Muslim communities in order to affirm Turkishness as the most 'civilized' way of being there existed in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace. Thus, the elimination of what had been conceived as closer to modernity meant that the Turkish ruling and intellectual elite under the new Republic could now

---

[115] Atatürk, 1933
[116] Vazquez, 2020, p. 57
[117] P. 58

openly manifest the supremacy of Turkishness over other subjectivities. This, I think, is clearly demonstrated in Gökalp's account on Kurdish tribes in his 1923 essay "The Village and the Town" published shortly after the foundation of the Republic:

> "The villages of the southern provinces are Turkish or Kurdish, but Turkish villages are outside of the areas where feudalism exists. […] To see the complete contradiction between the laws [of the state] and the actual practices, one should look at these feudal tribes of the Diyarbekir region. One will see here concretely how medieval feudal institutions are still alive in a country with a constitutional regime. Seeing these instances of economic feudalism, we can easily explain why the Turks are concentrated in the towns. In the southern provinces, freedom and equality, which the Turks have always loved, are found only in the towns where there are no chiefs, lords, or tribal leaders".[118]

In a word, one can see here a clear manifestation of a not modern yet but modernizing Turkish and Sunni Muslim-self as temporally the closest point to being modern in Anatolia and Eastern Thrace. But more importantly, in this account on the Kurdish tribes of Turkey's southeastern provinces by Gökalp, it is possible to observe that he locates the Kurds into a far distant past with his emphasis on their 'medieval feudal institutions' in contrast with the Turks who allegedly aspire sedentary-urban, and 'contemporary', or 'modern', life at every level. This shows that the coloniality of contemporaneity is not only related to modernity / coloniality at the level of self-racialization in many non-Western contexts such as Turkey, but also at the level of racializing other indigenous communities that they have been coexisting with for centuries.

Conclusion:

> "For years on end, Kurds have been trying to prove that they exist and Armenians that they were killed on these lands"[119]

This paper so far tried to introduce the late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey into the decolonial debate by focusing on the movement of modernity / coloniality from the West into Anatolia and Eastern Thrace in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. First, it has tried to provide an overview of decolonial thinking and reflected on the absence of Ottoman Empire and Turkey in the

---

[118] Gökalp, 1959, pp. 140-141

[119] An anonymous saying in Turkish that has been often expressed by Kurds and Armenians in Turkey, quoted in Cemal, H. (2015), *1915: Armenian Genocide,* p. 219.

previous accounts. Then, it has tried to provide an overview of how racial thinking has gained a new character in the late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey while maintaining certain Islamic ways of thinking, knowing, and governing. Finally, it has tried to provide a clearer picture of the self-racializing 'catching up' logic and how this inferiority complex was projected on racialized others by a caricature civilizer. The fundamental role of modernity / coloniality, especially the coloniality of contemporaneity, in the Turkish elite's projection of their own inferiority complexes onto Kurds and other racialized minorities yet requires further attention, not only as an issue of the past but also as an issue of the present. In a speech that he delivered a year ago, the current President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan provided a clear picture of how present this issue is in today's Turkey:

> "My young brothers, do not forget that each nation has an aspiration, a 'Red Apple', for which all its members would readily sacrifice their lives. Our Red Apple is building of the great and strong Turkey that would stand above the level of contemporary civilizations."[120]

Since the end of the Cold War, philosophers, sociologists, and activists from all parts of the world have been increasingly questioning the implications of the gradual but steady decline of the West's four hundred years of political, economic, and cultural hegemony over the rest of the world and the return of local civilization projects, exemplified by Turkey and Russia. Many claim that the world in which we live in today can be described as the age of "multiple modernities", emphasizing that the ideas of modernity and progress have conflated with various local civilization projects and their cultures.[121] Some scholars in the West, however, promote alternative concepts such as "varieties of modernity" based on their conviction that all these local civilization projects still follow – or must follow – the same line of structural processes as the Western civilization project to be able to affirm themselves as modern.[122]

The discussions on multiple modernities, however, as I have tried to show, have a much older history outside Europe, particularly in the Russian / Soviet and Ottoman / Turkish contexts during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Although these de-westernizing local civilization projects temporarily disappeared following the collapse of both Russian and Ottoman

---

[120] Erdoğan, 2019
[121] See, for instance, Eisenstadt, S. N. (2002). *Multiple Modernities*. New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers.
[122] See for instance, Schmidt, V. H. (2006). Multiple Modernities or Varieties of Modernity? *Current Sociology*, 54(1), 77–97.

Empires[123], one aspect that both mono-cultural state projects shared has continuously shaped the political culture in both Russia and Turkey until now: the logic of coloniality and the myth of modernization. Today, this temporary disappearance is over, and the self-racializing tendencies and their projection on racialized others are still present in both contexts. Accordingly, it has become more necessary than ever to ask ourselves the question as follows: what kind of dignifying conditions and alternative political structures can be created in such contexts as the post-Erdoğan Turkey, post-Putin Russia, in which everyone can live as 'minority' among 'minorities'?[124]

Particularly in the context of Turkey, some might claim that the solution lies in a return to the '1921 Spirit' and revive the horizontal and negotiating character of Muslimness contract. But as I have tried to show, Muslimness contract that shaped the 1921 Constitution during the War of Independence was also established on an all pervasive yet invisible structure and a racist system of thought. Today, the idea of '1921 spirit' indeed can be pragmatically seen as instrumental to emphasize the necessity of political decentralization in Turkey. But it offers us nothing in terms of helping to create dignifying conditions not only for Kurds but also the descendants of the victims of the 1915 genocidal campaign, who have been still living as Turkish citizens in lesser numbers and systematically subjected to racism under such labels as *dönme* (convert) and *kripto Ermeni* (hidden Armenian). It seems to me, therefore, that the only just option in Turkey and beyond is an effective political and epistemic decolonization on the basis of the notions of plurinationality and pluriversality, for which there is a major task awaiting decolonial scholars, thinkers, and activists on the ground. Yet, this task can only be accomplished if we as decolonial scholars, thinkers, and activists start thinking about racism and the invisible and all-pervasive structures that govern them like Fanon did: all forms of racism and exploitation that arise from a colonial situation "are identical, since they apply to the same 'object'"[125] – the humankind.

Bibliography:

Asad, T. (2003). *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

---

[123] Both Marxist-Leninism and Kemalism can be seen as attempts to create an alternative to Western liberalism while remaining within the parameters of Western civilization.

[124] The question I raise here is primarily inspired by the question raised by Talal Asad in the context of Europe: "What kind of conditions can be developed in secular Europe – and beyond – in which everyone may live as a minority among minorities?" (Asad, 2003, p. 180).

[125] Fanon, 2008, p. 69

Atatürk, M. K. (1933) "Tenth Year Speech" (English translation retrieved from URL: https://www.tac.k12.tr/en/Icerik/10-yil-nutku/74/)

Atatürk, M. K. (2019) *Eskişehir-İzmit Konuşmaları*. Kopernik: Istanbul.

Benlahcene, B. (2017). "The term "Civilization" in the Muslim intellectual Traditions: Changing Vocabulary and Varied Conceptions". *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*.

Cemal, H. (2015). *1915: The Armenian Genocide*. Hrant Dink Foundation: Istanbul.

Danzikyan, Y. (2016). Kürtler, akademisyenler, Ermeniler. *Agos*. URL: http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/14086/kurtler-akademisyenler-ermeniler

Deringil, S. (2003). "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery": The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 45*(02).

Dussel, E. (1993) "Eurocentrism and Modernity: Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures". *Boundary 2*. Vol: 20, No: 3, The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America (Autumn, 1993), pp. 65-76

Erdoğan, R. T. (2019). "Bizim kızılelmamız büyük ve güçlü Türkiye'nin inşasıdır". Retrieved January 23, 2021, from https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/105423/-bizim-kizilelmamiz-buyuk-ve-guclu-turkiye-nin-insasidir-

Fanon, F. (2001). *The Wretched of the Warth: Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre* (C. Farrington, Trans.). London: Penguin Books.

Fanon, F. (2008) *Black Skin White Masks,* Grove Press, New York.

Gökalp, Z. & Berkes, N. (1959). *Turkish nationalism and Western civilization: Selected essays of Ziya Gökalp. Translated and edited by Niyazi Berkes*. London: G. Allen and Unwin.

Gürses, M. (2018). *Anatomy of a Civil War: Sociopolitical Impacts of the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Hourani, A. (1957). "The Changing Face of the Fertile Crescent in the XVIIIth Century", *Studia Islamica*, No. 8, pp. 89-122

Ibn-Khaldūn, Rosenthal, F. & Dawood, N. J. (2015). *Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Princeton University Press.

Karpat, K. (2004) *Studies on Turkish Politics and Society: Selected Articles and Essays*. Leiden: Brill.

Kasaba, R. (2009). *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman nomads, migrants, and refugees*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Kechriotis, V. (2013) "Postcolonial criticism encounters late Ottoman studies". *Historein*. Vol: 13

Makdisi, U. (2002). "Ottoman Orientalism". *The American Historical Review*, 107(3), 768-796

Mignolo, W. (2009) "Dispensable and Bare Lives: Coloniality and the Hidden Political/Economic Agenda of Modernity, "*Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 7.

Mignolo, W. D. (2009). Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom. Theory, Culture & Society, 26(7–8), 159–181.

Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mignolo, W. (2013) "Imperial/Colonial Metamorphosis: A Decolonial Narrative, From the Ottoman Sultanate and Spanish Empire to the US and the EU". In Huggan, G. (ed.) (2013) *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford University Press.

Mignolo, W. & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Tlostanova, M. (2015). "Between the Russian/Soviet dependencies, neoliberal delusions, dewesternizing options, and decolonial drives". *Cultural Dynamics*, 2015, Vol. 27(2) 267–283

Ünlü, B. (2018). *Türklük Sözleşmesi: Oluşumu, işleyişi ve krizi*. Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları.

Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.3 Duke University Press.

Walsh, C. E. (2018). "Interculturality and Decoloniality". In: Mignolo, W. & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Walz, T. & Cuno, K. M. (2011). *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean.* The American University in Cairo.

Wynter, S. (1995). 1492: A New World View. In V. L. Hyatt & R. M. Nettleford (1995) *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Vazquez, R. (2020). *Vistas of Modernity*. Mondriaan Fund.

Part II (PhD Proposal): Toward a Critical-Decolonial Anatolian / East Thracian Philosophy

Summary:

The proposed research project for obtaining a PhD in philosophy aims to provide a radical new conception of epistemic and political decolonization that is suited for 'modernizing' non-Western contexts, particularly Turkey and other post-Ottoman states outside Europe, and their diaspora in the West. Throughout this research I will try to make use of the analytic tools provided by decolonial thinking and contribute to the ongoing process of delinking from, and resistance to, the hegemonic articulations of Muslimness and Turkishness in today's multipolar world, which can be seen as the core of an all-pervasive yet invisible racist structure derived from a local imitation of white supremacism. My long-term objective in this research project is to find satisfying answers to the leading question how Turkey and its systems of thought can be subjected to epistemic and political decolonization as a self-colonizing and colonizing mono-cultural state and civilization project in our no longer unipolar but still capitalist world system.

Description of the Proposed Research:

Turkey and its systems of thought are relatively complex but fruitful cases for a critical-decolonial investigation, which have been largely overlooked by most decolonial thinkers. As a nation-state strongly affected by Western narratives of modernity, it emerged from the ashes of the last Muslim Empire, which had never been colonized like many parts of the region often described as the 'Middle East'. Turkey, on the one hand, is just another Muslim-majority country that has gained independence after a long battle against European occupiers, whose ruling and intellectual elite had to deal with an immense 'catching up' and 'never again' complex. But Turkey, on the other hand, has been trying to position itself in the world as the closest point to being modernized among Muslim-majority countries since its foundation, where the systematic attempts to erase Kurdish culture as well as the ongoing resistance to the occupying Turkish state can be seen as a typical case

of colonial situation. These aspects that are peculiar to Turkish 'modernization', as opposed to Western 'modernity', cannot be overlooked in a critical-decolonial research on Turkey and its systems of thought in today's multipolar world.

The initial questions that I would like to provide answers during the first year of my research project is what it means to seek epistemic and political decolonization in the context of Turkey, and why Turkey was largely absent in the epistemic and political de-westernization and decolonization debates until recently. Firstly, this requires an overview of the debates among the influential diaspora and local scholars who opposed Eurocentric / Orientalist presuppositions about Middle Eastern cultural histories, and of the historical links between the calls for epistemic and political dewesternization and decolonization. The aim of the research project at this stage will be to provide a clearer picture of the absence of Turkey from these debates while not overlooking the geopolitical factors during the Cold War period behind this absence, and then to reflect on the shortcomings of the recent articulations of decolonization in the context of Turkey and other post-Ottoman states, such as Salman Sayyid's 2014 book *Recalling the Caliphate*.[126]

From this point onwards my research during the rest of the first year will be largely concerned with broader theoretical questions, particularly what can be further learned from the recent contributions to Fanonian trajectory of epistemic and political decolonization by decolonial thinkers, such as Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez, whose views can be partly seen as products of the Latin American indigenous struggles. Here, I will pay closer attention to their formulation of such conceptual frames as as modernity / coloniality, pluriversality, plurinationality, and coloniality of contemporaneity as well as the social and political contexts that they are rooted in. This detour is a crucial necessity to participate in the decolonial debate from the vantage point of Turkey and to formulate my own conception of epistemic and political decolonization suited for Turkey and other 'modernizing' post-Ottoman states. One reason for this is that it is necessary show why and how decolonization can offer something more than epistemic disobedience to, and delinking from, the Western narratives of modernity, which I think is precisely what has been recently offered by prominent authors in the field, exemplified by Sayyid.

Throughout the second year, the research project will examine the roots of structural racism in 'modern' Turkish-Islamic thought, which appeared in the late-nineteenth century but has a much

---

[126] The book can be seen as one of the first attempts to introduce Turkey into the decolonization debate.

older history considering how it has maintained certain classical Islamic ways of knowing about tribal, nomadic, and non-Muslim peoples. My initial starting point in this analysis will be an examination of the early Turkish-Islamic accounts on tribes and non-monotheistic peoples before the influence of Ibn-Khaldūn's racial philosophy on Ottoman-Turkish elite, such as Mahmud al-Kashgari's eleventh century book *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (Compendium of the Languages of the Turks). An examination of pre-Ibn-Khaldūnian accounts on nomadic and tribal peoples in Turkish-Islamic thought is necessary to find answers to the question how the Ottoman-Turkish elite developed their own racial philosophy partly inspired from Ibn-Khaldūn, which became far more antagonistic to nomadic and tribal peoples than Ibn-Khaldūn's simultaneously suspicious and idealizing attitude toward these peoples. Unlike previous studies in this area of research, particularly that of Selim Deringil and Reşat Kasaba, I will pay close attention here on the constructions Blackness in Ottoman-Turkish thought, and on the constructions of indigenous Ottoman communities that are simultaneously tribal, nomadic, and non-Muslim, such as the Yezidis.

In the rest of the second year, I will try to provide an introduction to Muslimness and Turkishness studies as interdisciplinary fields which try to explain the rise of structural Islamism under the Ottoman Empire in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and its subsequent transformation into structural Turkism under the Republic of Turkey as typical manifestations of structural racism in the 'modern' sense of the term. Here, my preliminary analysis of structural racism and its roots in 'modern' Turkish-Islamic thought will be largely based on the 2018 book *Turkishness Contract* by Barış Ünlü, which can be seen as the first major attempt by a scholar to introduce Turkey into the field of critical race studies.[127]

In the third year, I will firstly expand my observations during the second year of my research and provide a close reading of the influential texts by the late-Ottoman and Republican era Turkish intellectuals, such as Yusuf Akçura and Ziya Gökalp, to find answers to the question how these authors contributed to the formation of an all pervasive but invisible racist structure, which rendered certain lives dispensable, or unwanted. At this level, I will broadly examine the role of the genocidal myth of Turkish-Islamic modernization and its underlying colonial logic in the transformation of the late-Ottoman and Turkish understanding of the state and civilization into necessarily mono-cultural entities. Thus, I will analyze the 1915 genocidal campaign of Ottoman Christian Orthodox

---

[127] Ünlü's book is largely inspired from Charles Mills' 1997 book *The Racial Contract* which I will thoroughly discuss here.

population who resisted the Islamization of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace and the subsequent expansion of these policies into non-Turkish but Muslim communities who resisted the Turkification policies of the new Republic.

Secondly, I will try to provide an examination of the self-racializing logic of 'catching up' with the West and its effects on racialized minorities in the late-Ottoman Empire and Turkey through the conceptual frame coloniality of contemporaneity invented by Rolando Vazquez. Here, besides Ottoman and Turkish philosophers, such as Gökalp, who understood modernization as a synonym for becoming 'contemporary' with the West, I will focus on such sources from the popular culture of Turkey as Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar's novel *The Time Regulation Institute,* which is one of the clearest accounts on the role of the politics of time in Turkish state's position as the caricature civilizer in its periphery.

In the fourth and final year of my research, firstly I will try to provide the first critical-decolonial analysis of the Islamic revivalist and de-westernizing trajectory of modernization often described as Neo-Ottomanism, which has been promoted by the state of Turkey under the rule of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan since the late-2000s. Although most of the earlier studies on Neo-Ottomanism have been analyzing this phenomenon through the lens of multiple modernities, exemplified by Marwan Kraidy and Omar al-Ghazzi, my examination of Neo-Ottomanism and its roots in the Turkish-Islamic systems of thought will be largely based on Mignolo's critique of the celebratory articulations of multiple modernities and Fanon's critique of Pan-nationalist revivalisms. Thus, I will not only refer to pro-Erdoğan, or state-sponsored, articulations of Neo-Ottomanism, but also to the articulations of Neo-Ottomanism by the Gülenist diaspora scholars in the West, exemplified by Hakan Yavuz. At this stage of the research project, my aim will be to find answers to the question what makes Neo-Ottomanism 'new' considering that it maintains all pervasive but invisible racist structures intact.

Secondly, I would like to provide an article before I conclude my study that is exclusively dealing with themes emerged from gender studies, which are deeply connected with the themes and issues my research will be dealing with until this point. Although gender studies have never been my

specialization, the ongoing rise of homonationalism[128] in the West and heteronationalism[129] in many non-Western contexts including Turkey makes it a crucial necessity to engage with these issues and incorporate them in my research as a serious concern. Here, my account will be largely based on Jasbir Puar's book *Terrorist Assemblages* and Jin Haritaworn's *Queer Necropolitics*, and my aim will be to find answers to the question how homonationalism and heteronationalism consolidate each other in today's multipolar world.

In overall, this research project for obtaining a PhD in philosophy is not only aiming for a shift of discourse in Western academia, or changing the terms of discussion about Turkey and other post-Ottoman states outside Europe. But more importantly, it also aims to provide a concrete decolonial literature that can help creating more dignifying conditions in the long-term for the peoples of Anatolia and Eastern Thrace in the post-Erdoğan Turkey, and for the Anatolian / East Thracian diaspora in Europe. Thus, it should be noted that the authors of some of the publications on structural Islamism and Turkism, such as Barış Ünlü, have been purged from academia in Turkey, which created an atmosphere of fear among local scholars who engage in such academic debates. This reveals the necessity to start dealing with such themes and issues that are rooted in 'modern' Turkish-Islamic systems of thought from a 'safe' distance, while not overlooking how they also affect the real lives of real people here in Europe.

Workplan and Key Words:

This research project will be based on stand-alone and separately publishable articles, which will then form a coherent whole. Following the final editing, each article will be turned into a book chapter.

Year 1 (Introduction)[130]:

---

[128] Homonationalism can be described as the conflation of a nationalist ideology with LGBTQ+ rights discourse and the instrumentalization of the LGBTQ+ rights discourse as a part of a broader racist and xenophobic narrative of certain racialized minorities and countries. It often manifests itself in such practices as pinkwashing and in coalitions between certain white or Judeo-Christian supremacist and LGBTQ+ movements, exemplified by such cases as Israel and the Netherlands.

[129] Heteronationalism, by contrast, can be described as the conflation of a nationalist ideology with heteronormative values and norms. It often paradoxically follows the idea that queerness is a foreign Western invention and has no human value in a given local context, while heteronormativity is a perfect fit, despite its Western origins. Although Russia and Turkey can be seen as prime examples for it, this phenomenon can be also be found in such European contexts as Poland.

[130] It should be noted that the research during my first year requires a substantial preliminary research and preparation. Therefore, the publications outlined here will have relatively less workload compared to the second and third year.

- **Chapter 1:** On the Epistemic and Political De-westernization and Decolonization Debates (Key words: colonialism, postcoloniality, de-westernization, decolonization, Orientalism, decoloniality, epistemic disobedience).

- **Chapter 2:** On Decolonial Pluriversality and Decentralized Plurinational State: What Do Indigenous Struggles in Latin America Offer as a Model for Political Organization and How This Can Make a Horizontal 'South-to-South' Dialogue Possible? (Key words: modernity / coloniality, decoloniality, interculturality, plurinationality, pluriversality)

Year 2 (The Medieval and Modern Articulations of Race in Turkish-Islamic Thought)

- **Chapter 3:** On Racial Thinking in the Pre-capitalist Medieval Turkish-Islamic Thought Before and After Ibn-Khaldūn: Nomads, Enslavable Peoples, and Non-Muslims (Key words: blackness, Muslim slave trade, sedentary / nomadic dualism, medieval Islamic theory of civilization, cyclical notion of time)

- **Chapter 4:** On the Idea of Racial Contract and Its Effects on Turkish-Islamic Thought (Key words: racial contract, structural racism, Muslimness, Turkishness, modern Turkish-Sunni supremacism, Turkishness studies)

Year 3 (The Turkish Modernity Project):

- **Chapter 5:** From Resistance to 'Russification' to a Genocidal Myth: Turkish-Islamic Modernity Project (Key words: Jadidism, Turkism, Turkish-Islam synthesis, Red Apple myth, Kemalism)

- **Chapter 6:** On Politics of Time and Coloniality of Contemporaneity in Turkish Political Culture (Key words: coloniality of contemporaneity, the linear concept of time, 'catching up' logic, progress, modernization)

Year 4 (Conclusion and Final Editing)[131]:

- **Chapter 7:** On Post-Ottoman Legacies, Multiple Modernities, and Global Colonialities: A Decolonial Perspective (Key words: Neo-Ottomanism, clash of civilizations, core-state,

---

[131] After writing Chapter 8, I need half a year for the final editing, and for writing an introduction and conclusion. In case my articles appear in different journals, they will require additional reformatting to be able to get a single manuscript.

multiple modernities, multiple colonialities, universality, pluriversality, decentralization, plurinational state)

- **Chapter 8:** On Homonationalism, Heteronationalism, and Politics of Gender in Erdoğan's Turkey (homonationalism, heteronationalism, femicide, heteronormativity, Muslim LGBTQ+ struggles)

The research project will also require my attendance to several academic conferences and lecture series, such as Decolonial Summer School in Middleburg, Netherlands, where I might have the opportunity to meet Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez, and Critical Muslim Studies: Decolonial Struggles and Liberation Theologies in Granada, Spain, where I might have the opportunity to meet Salman Sayyid. Both will require roughly 2,000 Euros each (including tuition, accommodation, and travel costs). Besides these conferences and lecture series, I would like to arrange visits to the nearby cultural centers of the Anatolian / Thracian diaspora in Europe, such as *Das Ezidische Kulturelle Zentrum* in Oldenburg, Germany.

Summary for Non-Specialists:

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the term decolonization has appeared in many parts of the world and in many languages as a powerful rhetoric to express the need for political change that must go further than political independence, and for a radical new set of relationships between the colonizers and the colonized. Although the term had much less significance in Turkey compared to many other non-Western contexts until recently, today the term offers a radical new way of dealing with the lived legacies of genocidal conflicts, power relations, and mono-cultural state and civilization projects that have shaped the geography known as Anatolia and Eastern Thrace and devastated its demographic and cultural diversity since the late-nineteenth century. The proposed research project for obtaining a PhD in philosophy aims to introduce Turkey and its systems of thought into what has been described in Western academia as decolonization debate in order to provide a radical new conception of epistemic and political decolonization that is suited for 'modernizing' non-Western contexts, particularly Turkey and other post-Ottoman states outside Europe, and their diaspora in the West.

Bibliography:

Çelebĭ, E., Kreiser, K., Bruinessen, M. V., Elsie, R. (1988). *Evlĭya Çelebĭ's Book of travels: Land and people of the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century*. Leiden: Brill.

Darling, L. T. (1996). *Revenue-raising and Legitimacy: Tax Collection and Finance Administration in the Ottoman Empire, 1560-1660*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Deringil, S. (2003). "They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery": The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 45*(02).

Fanon, F. (2001). *The Wretched of the Warth: Preface by Jean-Paul Sartre* (C. Farrington, Trans.). London: Penguin Books.

Fanon, F. (2008) *Black Skin White Masks,* Grove Press, New York.

Haritaworn, J., Kuntsman, A., & Posocco, S. (2015). *Queer necropolitics*. London: Routledge.

Hodgson, M. G. (1974). *The Venture of Islam* (Vol. 1-3). Chicago: University of Chicago press.

Hourani, A. (1957). "The Changing Face of the Fertile Crescent in the XVIIIth Century", *Studia Islamica*, No. 8 (1957), pp. 89-122

Huntington, S. P. (1998). *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order*. London: Touchstone Books.

Kalın, I. (2005). "Islam and Peace: A Survey of the Sources of Peace in the Islamic Tradition", *Islamic Studies*, Autumn 2005, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Autumn 2005), pp. 327-362

Kalın, I. (2012). "Turkish Foreign Policy". *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis, 67*(1), 7-21.

Kasaba, R. (2009). *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman nomads, migrants, and refugees*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Kraidy, M., & Al-Ghazzi, O. (2013). Neo-Ottoman Cool: Turkish Popular Culture in the Arab Public Sphere. Popular Communication, 11 (1), 17-29

Lewis, B. (1958). "Some Reflections on the Decline of the Ottoman Empire", *Studia Islamica*, No. 9, pp. 111-127

Mbembe, A. (2019) *Necropolitics*. Durham; London: Duke University Press

Mignolo, W. (2009) "Dispensable and Bare Lives: Coloniality and the Hidden Political/Economic Agenda of Modernity, "*Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 7.

Mignolo, W. D. (2009). Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom. Theory, Culture & Society, 26(7–8), 159–181.

Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Mignolo, W. (2013) "Imperial/Colonial Metamorphosis: A Decolonial Narrative, From the Ottoman Sultanate and Spanish Empire to the US and the EU". In Huggan, G. (ed.) (2013) *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies.* Oxford University Press.

Mignolo, W. & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Mills, C. (1997). *The Racial Contract.* Cornell University Press.

Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times.* Durham, NC, Chesham: Duke University Press.

Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism.* New York: Random House.

Sajdi, D. (2007). *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century.* I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited.

Sayyid, S. (2014). *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonisation and World Order.* London: Hurst & Company.

Tanpinar, A. H. (2014). *The Time Regulation Institute.* New York: Penguin Books.

Tlostanova, M. (2015). "Between the Russian/Soviet dependencies, neoliberal delusions, dewesternizing options, and decolonial drives". *Cultural Dynamics*, 2015, Vol. 27(2) 267–283

Ünlü, B. (2018). *Türklük Sözleşmesi: Oluşumu, işleyişi ve krizi.* Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları.

Walz, T. & Cuno, K. M. (2011). *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean.* The American University in Cairo.

Wynter, S. (1995). 1492: A New World View. In V. L. Hyatt & R. M. Nettleford (1995) *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View.* Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Vazquez, R. (2020). *Vistas of Modernity*. Mondriaan Fund.

Yavuz, H. (2016). Social and Intellectual Origins of Neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a Post-National Vision, *Die Welt des Islams*, 2016, Vol. 56, Issue 3/4, Special Theme Issue: Ottomanism Then & Now (2016), pp. 438-465.

Curriculum Vitae:

Name: Bala Ulaş Ersay

Birthdate: 22. 05. 1992

Birthplace: Beyoğlu, Istanbul

Nationality: Turkish

Contact Information: Timorstraat 11, 6524 KA, Nijmegen, Netherlands

 GSM: (NL) +31 639073856

E-mail address: buersay@gmail.com, b.ersay@student.ru.nl

 Languages: • Turkish (native, cannot read Ottoman / Arabic script) • English (advanced) • German (intermediate, can read simple texts but not complex philosophical publications)

Research Areas: postcolonial / decolonial studies, critical race studies, Middle Eastern studies, critical Islamic studies, Turkish political philosophy

Publications and Research Funds: None

Conferences and Summer Schools Attended: 2019, Decolonial Summer School. Middelburg, Netherlands (unofficially attended as a guest)

Education:

- 2018 – present Radboud University, Research Master's in Philosophy (Specialization: Social and Political Philosophy)
- 2017 – 2018 Radboud University, Premaster, Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies

- September 2013 – 2016 Maastricht University, BA Arts and Culture, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

    ♣ 2015 – 2016 Major in Media Culture

    ♣ 2015 – 2016 Minor in Crucial Differences

- 2010 -2012 Kadir Has University, International Relations (English Track)

- 2006 – 2010 Özel Antalya Lisesi (high school, in Antalya, Turkey)