



Ottomanism at its Final Gasp: Memoirs of the Ottomans on Duty in Arab Provinces during World War I

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Abstract

This study aims to expose the ways in which leading officials of the Committee of Union and Progress (the CUP) interpreted, internalized, and questioned the conditions of their mission in Arab lands during World War I (WWI). It builds on the memoirs of Falih Rıfki, aide-de-camp of Commander-in-Chief Cemal Pasha, and Halide Edip, an ardent supporter of the social and educational reforms of the CUP government. Both written after the war, these memoirs reflect not only nostalgia and regret but also the complicated relationship between Turkish officials and Arabs on the eve of their breakup from one another as citizens of the Ottoman State. The study also questions the orthodox argument that the Turkist and anti-Arabic ideology of the CUP government in general and Cemal Pasha's wartime crusade against Arab nationalists in particular triggered the emergence of Arab nationalism. By contemplating the memoirs of CUP members in Arab lands, this study argues that Falih Rıfki, Cemal Pasha, and Halide Edip tried to understand the region and its people in order to create a mutual future for Turks and Arabs within the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: Cemal Pasha, Falih Rıfki, Halide Edip, the Committee of Union and Progress, Arab Nationalism

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Son Nefesinde Osmanlıcılık: Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Arap Vilayetlerinde Görev Yapan Osmanlıların Hatıraları

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Öz

Bu makale, Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Arap Cephesi'nde görev yapan İttihat ve Terakki Cephesi hükümetinin önde gelen sorumlularının, bu görevlerini nasıl içselleştirdiklerini, sorguladıklarını ve yorumladıklarını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, Falih Rıfki'nin ve emir eri bulunduğu Başkumandan Cemal Paşa'nın ve İTC hükümetinin topluma ve eğitime yönelik reformlarının sıkı bir taraftarı olan Halide Edip'in hatıralarına dayanmaktadır. Her biri savaştan sonra kaleme alınan bu hatıralar, özlem ve pişmanlık hislerinin yanında, birbirlerinden Osmanlı Devleti vatandaşları olarak ayrılmak üzere olan Araplar ve Türkler arasındaki çetrefilli ilişkiyi göz önüne sermektedir. Bununla birlikte makale, genel olarak İTC idaresinin Türkçü ve Arap karşıtı ideolojisinin ve özelde savaş sırasında Cemal Paşa'nın Arap milliyetçiliğine karşı başlattığı mücadelenin, Arap milliyetçiliğinin doğuşunda başat rol oynadığına dair geleneksel düşünceyi de sorgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Arap topraklarında bulunan İTC üyelerinin hatıralarına dayanarak, Falih Rıfki, Cemal Paşa ve Halide Edip'in, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Türkler ve Araplara ait ortak bir gelecek inşa etmek amacıyla bölgeyi ve halkını anlamaya gayret ettiklerini ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cemal Paşa, Falih Rıfki, Halide Edip, İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti, Arap Milliyetçiliği

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1. Introduction

The Balkan Wars (1912-1913) deprived the Ottoman Empire of the majority of Rumelia, once the stronghold of the Ottoman holy war against the Christian rule, which had given the state its leading position in the Muslim world. Following the Tanzimat reforms, the region became even more significant in showing the success of Ottoman modernization as it had been more developed than any other part of the Empire in terms of commerce and agriculture. The loss of Rumelia, or Western Thrace, encouraged the warmongers, who claimed that it was only by joining the war that the Ottomans could change their ill fortune. Hoping to reclaim its losses, the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers against Russia, England, and France, the leading contenders for Ottoman territories, on condition that the first Ottoman offensive should be against British Egypt.¹

While nation-states divided Western Thrace among themselves, “the Arab provinces proved to be the last stand of the Ottoman state as a modern multi-ethnic empire.”² During the Great War, the Arab region became the object of meticulous concerns of the Committee of Union and Progress government and witnessed efforts to keep the remaining Ottoman lands intact. CUP officials encountered revolts or ‘betrayals’ throughout the Arab lands and used violent methods to cope with insurgents. Arab provinces witnessed most of these questionable measures, including the Armenian massacre, which left their marks in the modern history of the region. Furthermore, these were the last phases in which the supranational Ottomanist ideology was tested and evaluated as the principal policy of the state, according to the state’s new geographical definition. That is to say, in the context of wartime measures, the Ottoman administration and its officials regenerated the ideological stance of the state, and tried to redefine the new contract between the state and its Arab subjects.

This paper aims to analyze the final ideological agenda adopted by the Ottoman elite to keep the remaining part of the state intact by drawing on the memoirs of two Turkish intellectuals and the head of the Ottoman army

¹ Sean McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame: War, Revolution and the Making of the Modern Middle East, 1908-1923* (London: Penguin, 2016), 127.

² Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 793.

in the region. Both authors were sent from the center to Syria and Lebanon as part of the Ottoman military mission, in order to protect them from the British forces and to help the Arabs to internalize their re-defined position within the reconfigured policy of the state toward its non-Turkish citizens.

These memoirs belong to Falih Rıfki, one of the prominent authors later in the Republican Era, Cemal Pasha, one of the three leaders of the CUP regime, and Halide Edip, the so-called “Jeanne d’Arc of modern Turkey”. Assigned to put into practice a very complex and vague ideology, these individuals expressed the image of Arabs in the eyes of the central cadre of the CUP regime. Although the two intellectuals, Falih Rıfki and Halide Edip, were not organically linked to the regime, they were among those who supplied the regime with ideas about the ways in which Ottoman modernization had to be implemented. Reflecting the contemporary western orientalist view, they considered the life in Arab lands as a direct sign of the decadence of the Empire. The Arabs, regardless of their role in the current political situation, were identified and represented as the decadent half of the Empire. Nevertheless, Falih Rıfki’s memoirs, for instance, reveal a dualist view. While his image of the Arab people fit into orientalist conceptions, he confessed the fact that the level of prosperity in the region was much higher than in Anatolia. This dualist view, which portrays Arab lands as more prosperous than Anatolia but also more decadent, is one of the issues that I will try to analyze here.

Both memoirs were produced years after the Ottoman mission in Arab lands. Cemal Pasha’s memoirs were published in 1920, as an apology not only for his role in the crimes of the CUP regime during the war, but also for his military decisions, which failed to defend the Southern front. Halide Edip’s memoirs were written for an English audience in order to draw their attention to the Muslim cause, which was under great pressure of the victorious Western imperialism following WWI. Lastly, Falih Rıfki’s *Zeytindağı* was written nearly two decades after his first memoirs of the war, *Ateş ve Güneş*, when the author had left behind Ottoman ideals long ago.

Although both were written on different concerns for different audiences, and even in different languages, these texts provide different views on the Arab world and reflect complex and elaborate interpretations of the Ottoman intellectuals and CUP members. Cemal Pasha’s military and

political explanations, Halide Edip's observations on of the West's cultural impact on the Arab region, and Falih Rifkî's comparisons between the social structures in the region and in Anatolia overlap one another, and help to construct a multidimensional narrative of the Ottoman mission in Arab lands during WWI.

Moreover, these authors' representation of the Arab world in their memoirs reflects the roles that were assigned by the regime to the Arabs and Turks in the Empire after the Balkan Wars. These roles were about to define the future of the Turks and the Arabs within the Empire. Both officials believed that the two nations would not be able to survive western imperialism and the Great War without the help of each other. However, Arabs did not have the means to struggle against these powerful Western forces. Accordingly, the role of Turks was defined as helping Arab nation to regain its power to implement modernization in Arab provinces.³ Makdisi pictures this relationship as the evolution of the Empire's patrimonial responsibility, which was developed in the Hamidian regime, into the patrimonial role of the Turkish nation led by the CUP regime.⁴

Considering the fact that it is impossible to read the history of Arab nationalism without referring to late Ottoman history, the arguments on the origins of Arab nationalism can be reviewed according to the political decisions taken by both the Hamidian and CUP administrations. The impact of CUP politics and ideology on the emergence of Arab nationalism has been a very critical historiographical question when examining the motives behind the Arab revolt and following events in the region. Changing political conditions throughout the twentieth century had determined the historical approach to the relationship between the late Ottoman Empire and its Arabic subjects. Therefore, any further analysis on the relationship between Ottoman politics and the emergence of Arab nationalism, whether on the micro or the macro level, needs particular consideration of the historical background.

There has been a tension between historical research and historical accounts of Arabs on their revolt against the Ottoman state. In many cases,

³ Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat*, transliterated by Behçet Cemal (İstanbul: Arma Yayınları, 1996), 220-30.

⁴ Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 792-96.

historians have helped Arab nations to construct their national identity, and to embellish this identity with a national Arab historiography. In these accounts, the politics and the identity of the CUP government have been used as an excuse for the Arabs cooperating with Western powers against a Muslim empire and the caliph. In this sense, the CUP's so-called Turkish identity, its centralistic policies, and its 'accommodation' of Zionism have been considered as the prominent failures of the government to keep its Arab subjects under Ottoman rule.⁵

Nevertheless, recent studies have been deconstructing the dominant historical approaches by directly questioning its premises about the origins of Arab nationalism. In his article on the manifestation of Arab discontent with the Ottoman government prior to WWI, Mahmoud Haddad states that the Turkification policies that provoked Arab nationalism were implemented in the beginning of the reign of Abdulhamid II, when the sultan ordered that Turkish must replace Arabic in the new institutions of administration and education.⁶

For Haddad, Arab nationalism took shape "not as a reaction to Ottomanism, but as a reaction to the possibility of its disappearance."⁷ Were the CUP leaders in general and Cemal Pasha in particular against Ottomanist ideology? Did they replace the supranational foundation of Tanzimat ideals, including fair representation in government, with Turkish nationalism? Dealing with these questions, this paper owes much to Ernest Dawn's analysis of the identity of CUP members, the quality of their so-called Turkification policies, and their modernization projects within the region. Dawn mentions the error of the historians of the older generation in exaggerating Turkish nationalism within the CUP. For him, the CUP had members from diverse political affiliations, and the policy of the party was mainly pro-Ottoman and modernist. The party's role in the political transformation was in line with Ottomanism and modernism, which had

⁵ For instance, see, Zeine N. Zeine, *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Caravan, 1973).

⁶ Mahmoud Haddad, "The Rise of Arab Nationalism Reconsidered," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 2 (May 1994): 202.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 217.

emerged as early as the introduction of the Tanzimat reforms in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁸

The memoirs of Cemal Pasha, Falih Rıfki, and Halide Edip support Dawn's arguments in two ways. First, all of these memoirs expose the stringent efforts of the individuals in the CUP cadre to rescue the Empire, which was in great peril. In the days of fierce conflict during WWI, all of them managed to produce meticulous projects for the future of the empire and faithfully performed every single task they had been assigned to. Doubtlessly, these memoirs document the efforts of the CUP cadre to keep the Ottoman state out of difficulties that could arise from ethnic loyalties. Second, these personal accounts display the fact that implementing modern reforms was fundamental, not only for these individuals but for the headquarters of the CUP and Enver Pasha, who sent these individuals to accomplish specific missions, either political or educational.

The perceptions of these individuals about Arabs reflect a certain official and cultural discourse. Their role in Arab provinces needs to be elaborated regarding the role of Arabs and Turks in the Empire and their attitudes vis-à-vis each other. Their personal impressions of the Arabs as well as of the everyday life; customs, behaviors, religious zeal, and gender relations in Arab lands are considered here for providing critical evidence on the subject. It should also be noted that these memoirs helped the Republican discourse to generate a discourse on the Arabs and their world, and contributed to modern Turks' ambiguous perceptions of their former compatriots.

2. Strangers in Arab Lands

Cemal Pasha, the head of the fourth army in Syria, asked Falih Rıfki, a young journalist in a daily newspaper, to join his cause, which was mainly to liberate Egypt from the British yoke. During WWI, Falih Rıfki served as aide-de-camp to the Pasha and the chief of the political and administrative department in Ottoman army headquarters in Jerusalem. He was responsible

⁸ C. Ernest Dawn, "The Origins of Arab Nationalism," in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva S. Simon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 18-20.

for public relations and popularizing the acts and deeds of Cemal Pasha in the region.⁹

Falih Rıfki published his memoirs about his service in the Ottoman military during the war in November 1918, weeks after the armistice. *Ateş ve Güneş* narrates the military and administrative story of the Ottoman Fourth Army under Cemal Pasha during WWI. This first edition in Ottoman-Turkish was followed by *Zeytindağı*, fourteen years later in Latinized Turkish, when the idea of an Ottoman nation had already been deemed delusional. Although the contents of both versions are identical regarding the criticism against military operations and the CUP cadre, the critical tone in the emphasis of geography and people in *Zeytindağı* is more noticeable.¹⁰ The boldness in the tone of *Zeytindağı* derived from the didactical responsibility felt by the first generation of the republic to explain to younger generations “what went wrong” during the final days of the Empire.

Zeytindağı, named after the hill that hosted the military quarters of Cemal Pasha in Jerusalem, is one of the most significant literary works in Turkish language on the Ottoman cause in the Arab region during WWI. Its significance not only stems from the fact that the book reflects the perspectives of an officer from the inner circle, but also from certain literary techniques that were used to create a political narrative. The account in *Zeytindağı* is constructed within the sequence of certain events that are vital to understand the policies of war against both the British forces and the Arab nationalists. Second, it reflects an Ottoman-Turkish writer’s feelings about Arabs and their world. Third, written in the heyday of the republican ideology, these memoirs are crucial given that they present an attempt to construct a witness account of the Ottoman mission, when the Ottoman option was still on the table.

In that sense, Falih Rıfki’s personal portrayal of the region and its people generates many discussions and may help us to materialize the recent arguments about the origins of modern Turkish perceptions of Arabs, one of which was represented by Makdisi on Ottoman and Turkish orientalism.

⁹ M. Talha Çiçek, “Myth of the Unionist Triumvirate: the Formation of the CUP Factions and their impact in Syria during the Great War,” in *Syria in World War I: Politics, Economy and Society*, ed. M. Talha Çiçek (New York: Routledge, 2015), 23.

¹⁰ Funda Selçuk Şirin, “Bir Gazeteci ve Aydın Olarak Falih Rıfki Atay (1893-1971),” *Vakanüvis* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2017), 260-61.

Zeytindağı is helpful in distinguishing the perception of the self and the other, not prominently in terms of the studies of the encounters between the orient and the occident.¹¹ Primarily, it offers an account of the encounters between the Arab and Turkish nationalisms, when the Turks were looking forward to their finest hour.

On 1 August 1914, celebrating the agreement between the CUP administration and Germany, Falih Rıfkı wrote that the Empire was “facing the sun.”¹² When he was called to join the Ottoman mission in Jerusalem, he immediately departed from Istanbul, fearing not to arrive on time to see the re-conquest of Egypt. He thought that Enver Pasha himself entered the war on behalf of the Germans, and feared that he would not make it on time to see their victory.¹³ Falih Rıfkı found Cemal Pasha deciding the fate of Arab nationalists from Nablus in his office in the military headquarters, Jerusalem. Before housing Ottoman officers, the building belonged to the Germans. It was on top of one of the hills, called *Cebel ez-Zeytun*, dominating the cityscape. From the office windows, one can see the panorama of Palestine, the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and Old Jerusalem:

*I am on top of the Zeytindağı, looking at the Dead Sea and the Greek Mountains. Far away, there is the whole left shore of the Red Sea, Hejaz and Yemen. When I turn my head, the Dome of Kamame is catching my eyes. This is Palestine. At the lower part, there are Lebanon and Syria; standing on one direction to the Suez Canal, on the other to the Persian Gulf; deserts, cities; and upon all, there is our flag. I am an offspring of this great empire.*¹⁴

These verses of self-importance are rather reflecting the amazement of a young Ottoman realizing his spatial disorientedness resulting from his national and ideological identity than expressions of national pride. In the age of nation-states, most citizens of empires, who traveled to dissimilar regions under the same flag have felt the same disorientedness.¹⁵ This

¹¹ Dawn, “The Origins of Arab Nationalism,” 5-7.

¹² Falih Rıfkı, “Karanlık Önünde,” *Tanin*, 1 August 1914.

¹³ Falih Rıfkı Atay, *Zeytindağı* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1970), 32-3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁵ See, Christoph Herzog and Raoul Motika, “Orientalism ‘alla Turca’: Late 19th / Early 20th Century Ottoman Voyages into the Muslim ‘Outback,’” *New Series: Ottoman Travels and Travel Accounts from an Earlier Age of Globalization, Die Welt des Islams* 40, no. 2 (July 2000): 139-95.

difficulty was not unique to Ottoman individuals; also different groups, parties, ethnicities in the Empire tried to interpret their positions and those of others in the society or on the map. Multiple identities of an individual, as a citizen of an empire, were precipitously becoming complicated and volatile. In 1914, after the loss of the Balkans, Falih Rıfki, a Roumelian Turk, made similar comments of disorientedness about Anatolia. In 1914, he claimed that the place did not feel intact with diverse languages and identities living together.¹⁶ The idea of a homeland was already intangible for young Ottomans. Therefore, the first reflections of the writer on Arab lands echoed his first impressions of Anatolia after the loss of the Balkans, the real homeland of most of the CUP cadre.

The text reflects the perplexity of a young Ottoman as he felt that these were the last days of the Empire not because these lands would be surrendered to the enemy, but due to the incongruity between the portrait of the Empire and its legitimacy. These were the days, when the lands of a country were nothing but dots on the map. The Ottoman geography, its Middle Eastern section, is depicted as a historical being in *Zeytindağı*. For the young Ottoman who catches the train with enthusiasm in Istanbul, the view from the hill in Jerusalem suggests the feeling of the end, the decadence. This is the illustration of a moment of awakening.

The legitimacy of Ottoman rule in the region is one of the significant issues that were mentioned in *Zeytindağı*. In the beginning, Falih Rıfki welcomed the idea of a Turkish-Arab Empire. Interestingly enough, he argued that Turkish nationalism would contribute to the erosion of Islamic-Ottoman mentality among the Turkish intelligentsia, and pave the way for a federation between Turks and Arabs.¹⁷ He believed that “political authority can be maintained in the region, which mainly consisted of Muslims.”¹⁸

Falih Rıfki first went to Jerusalem as a citizen of the country that held the holy lands under control. Nevertheless, it seems that later on, he questioned whether the Turks ever managed to take part in the history of civilization,

¹⁶ Tanıl Bora, *Cereyanlar: Türkiye’de Siyasi İdeolojiler*, 4th edition (Istanbul: İletişim, 2017), 245.

¹⁷ Falih Rıfki Atay, *Çankaya* (Istanbul: Doğan Kardeş, 1969), 245.

¹⁸ Ozan Kuyumcuoğlu, “Geç Osmanlı’dan Erken Cumhuriyet’e Siyasal Seçkinlerin Suriye’ye Bakışı: Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın ve Falih Rıfki Atay Örnekleri,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 16, no. 64 (2019): 112.

a significant chapter of which had taken place in this region, where Cemal Pasha pitched his garrison on. This major question also characterizes the writer's judgment on the general framework of the relationship between Turks and the residents of the region, the Arabs, despite the connection of the Turks to the land. Moreover, the author announces the end of the idea of the Empire. It seems that Turks had always been strangers in Arab lands:

Naked Jesus was a carpenter's pupil in Nazareth. However, when he passed over Zeytindağı, he himself had his own donkey that he rode. We are tenants in Jerusalem. Not only is the Turkish paper (currency) not valid farther than Aleppo, but also Turkish and the Turk. As much as Florence, Jerusalem was not ours. We stroll like tourists on the streets.¹⁹

'We' does not signify the citizens of the Ottoman Empire anymore. It refers the Turks that were alienated even from the lands that gave the Ottomans their legitimacy to rule the Muslim world four centuries. Falih Rıfki represents the transition of a Turkish intellectual from being a member of the Ottoman society into becoming a simple Turk. Nevertheless, this is not an idea derived from the nationalism in progress among the Turks at that time led by CUP ideologues. It is more like a confession of the historical failure of the idea of an Ottoman Empire. The author implies that there had never been an Ottoman Empire, at least not as an integral political, social or cultural entity.

The position of Falih Rıfki in Jerusalem as a tourist represented this failure of integrity. Following these first expressions, which were displaying the irrelevance of Ottoman rule in the region, the whole mission of Turks in WWI on Arab lands was no longer a source of enthusiasm. The memory of the day when young Ottoman Falih Rıfki caught the train in Haydarpaşa immediately turned into a tourist expedition in which he suspected the validity of an Ottoman nation. This is not an analysis deriving from the unstable political environment during WWI. It indicates the doom of a greater historical ideology, which he and his comrades submitted themselves to glorify without hesitation. The idea of the Empire had failed. The Ottoman state represented neither political power nor a pioneer of modernization in the region.

The idea of Ottomanism had already been questioned since the failure of

¹⁹ Atay, *Zeytindağı*, 36.

the Hamidian regime in reinstalling the parliament after it was shut down in 1878. Critics of the sultan for his reluctance to proclaim consultative and representative institutions were not only the Young Turks. Also, many Arab intellectuals, like Rafiq Bey al-‘Azm, mainly binding their arguments to religious principles, demanded democracy, *meşveret*.²⁰ Falih Rıfki points out the failure of constitutional ideals promised by the CUP cadre in 1908. Agreeing with the idea of the demise of Ottomanist ideology, he further announces the end of its heir, a democratic empire in which every member of the society would be represented. For him, the discourse of the CUP regime was modernization under Turkish leadership. Conducting the reforms, Turks would operate as the signal tower in the new empire:

*We were forcing ourselves without depending on reality but on the sense of history. It was obligatory that the whole of Anatolia should be reconstructed; cities, towns, houses and farms should be rich; Turks to be westernized; and only then should we run over from Aleppo to the Red Sea with the population, the technique, and the capital.*²¹

The failure of the CUP agenda owes much to its bold attempt to change the nineteenth century supranational policies of the state in favor of the principle of political guidance of an ethnic group, the Turks. There are several reasons for the failure of CUP plans in Arab lands. First, it was the image of the Turks in the area. Even though many families, which adhered to Arab nationalism, were originally Turkish including the famous ‘Azm family of Syria. Nothing Turkish was popular in the region. One cannot notice the footsteps of Turkish administration even in the urban space. Falih Rıfki admitted: “the most beautiful building of Jerusalem belongs to the Germans, the second also belongs to them, the greatest belongs to the Russians, all others belong to the English, the French, and to other nations.”²²

Even though, Anatolia and Arab lands stand side by side on the map, there is no interaction between them. Furthermore, there was a disparity between Anatolia and Arab lands. The CUP ideology hoped to modernize the new Ottoman mainland, Anatolia, and to spread this achievement to the Arab

²⁰ Caesar E. Farah, *Arabs and Ottomans: A Checkered Relationship* (Istanbul: The ISIS Press, 2002), 9-19.

²¹ Atay, *Zeytindağı*, 38.

²² Ibid.

region. Nevertheless, Arab lands and cities were incomparably richer than the ones in Anatolia. The author's perception of the history of Ottoman expansion in the region displays the ways in which the Turks, coming from the barren highlands of Anatolia, were amazed when they approached the magnificent Arab cities. He states: "When we pass over Anatolia and ring the doors of Aleppo, we begin to see the crowds and prosperity. Aleppo was a great city, Damascus was a great city, Beirut was a great city and Jerusalem was a great city. And all were foreign to us."²³

Third, the region was unknown to the Ottoman cadre. Ottoman officials were strangers and they were ignorant toward Arab lands. They had no clue about the political formation in the region, the struggle, and balance between the tribes or ethnic groups. Falih Rifki regretted that even the westerners; the British, the Russians or the Italians had a better understanding about the region and its people. For him, "among those British, Russians, Italians and the Ottomans, the ones that had the least information and understanding on the issues concerning Syria, Palestine, and Hejaz, were the Ottomans who were allegedly the possessors of these lands."²⁴

Moreover, although the CUP cadre believed that the Turks and Arabs, the last remaining prominent elements of the Empire especially after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), shared a collective history and religion, Arabs and their lands were mysterious to Turks as much as they were to Europeans. Being aware of that foreignness, Falih Rifki regards the Turkish elite in the region as the occupying force, and describes the feeling of exoticism through their eyes as for instance when saying, "...women are belly dancing on camels, and spears are adorned by furs, the whole African fantasia."²⁵

Such phantasmagorical depictions are typical devices, through which the European orientalist literature constructs the Arab world that makes the unintelligible and the exotic 'other,' intelligible. They provide Western discourse with cultural references according to which the Western world constructs itself as superior to its eastern opposite. In Falih Rifki's account, literary devices that were dedicated to make the Arab world intelligible were used to exaggerate the ontological differences between Turks and Arabs.

²³ Ibid., 38-9.

²⁴ Ibid., 42.

²⁵ Ibid.

Nevertheless, the main motive in his depictions is not prominently to display the Turks as superior to the Arabs. The main framework in *Zeytindağı* does not represent or configure the Turkish nationalistic approach that was produced by the CUP. Therefore, Rıfki's memoirs cannot be regarded as a source to represent growing nationalistic feelings of the Turks as the ultimate reason for the emergence of Arab nationalism. Falih Rıfki used the Orientalistic approach not in order to degrade Arabs and their world but to picture the despair in which the Ottoman officials in the region found themselves. The Turks in the region were desperate in terms of their knowledge about Arabs. The author bemoaned the desolation of the Turks in the Arab world given that Europeans were exerting influence on the region more and more, for example by introducing Western-oriented facilities from education to finance. The relationship between Turks and Arabs during WWI was not different from the general outline of that growing political and cultural unfamiliarity between the last remaining nations of the Ottoman Empire.

Within this framework, Cemal's regime in Syria during the war indicated not only the military measures that were taken in order to struggle against the occupying forces. It also operated as a power mechanism against Arab nationalists, who were struggling to convince the native Arabs that Ottoman rule was doomed. Until the end of the war, the CUP regime under Cemal Pasha tried hard to eliminate objections coming from local Arab leaders. The dominant historiographical tendencies have depicted these efforts as main motives behind the emergence of Arab nationalism, particularly in Syria. Disregarding the terms and impact of opposition within the Arabs, Cemal Pasha has been presented as a scapegoat for leaving Arabs no choice but to rise against their state. Being 'a very ambitious and despotic man', the reign of terror at the hands of the Pasha has been regarded as the reason of Arab nationalist urges.²⁶

Falih Rıfki, in his description of the executions of nationalist Arab leaders in Syria, tries to contemplate the main motives of the Pasha. This description also needs to be assessed according to the above-mentioned ontological resistance that Turks and the CUP regime encountered from Arabs in the region. The author opposed the idea that there was a dispute between Cemal

²⁶ Zeine, *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism*, 101-2.

Pasha and other members of the CUP triumvirate (Enver and Talat Pashas), concerning the former's policies in the region against Arab nationalists. The main and only reason of the disagreement was the fact that Enver and Talat wanted the decisions of the military court in the region, which were made by Cemal, to be consulted with the ministry of defense in Istanbul. Nevertheless, both Falih Rıfki and Cemal Pasha himself, were perplexed about their feelings for those who were executed. Clearly, Falih Rıfki ideologically praises the CUP for being the most ruthless enemy of the protagonists of ethnic separation, and simply links the executions led by Cemal Pasha to the *raison d'être* of not only the ruling party but also the Ottoman state. Although being ideologically devout to the centralist paradigm, Ottoman officials were somehow sympathetic to the Arabs who were executed. Falih Rıfki tries to expose that these executions were heartbreaking also for Cemal Pasha as follows:

A beautiful lady in black garments and her child greeted Cemal Pasha as he climbed down the stairs of his mansion in Beirut. The kid threw a bouquet of flowers to Pasha's feet and begged him to forgive his father. I saw the commander trying to hide his tears. Because, that woman in black, on the way back home, was going to see his beloved husband's dead cold body in the corner of the square.²⁷

Not only were the Ottoman officials sorry for the executed but they also respected these young nationalists. The writer clearly represents those who were executed as idealist and brave: "Those who were hanged in Beirut were mostly young nationalists. They walked from the dungeon to the rope, brave and hardnosed, by chanting the Arab anthem."²⁸

The ambivalence between political measures and personal sympathy stems firstly from the fact that Falih Rıfki wrote *Zeytindağı* in 1930s, when the republican cadre announced nationalism as one of the pillars of the regime. Needless to say, the intellectual milieu was suitable to discuss the stories of ethnic groups within the Ottoman Empire apart except Kurds or Armenians being anathema to the republican ideology of the time. Therefore, reading history retrospectively, the author's sympathy for Arab nationalists is highly understandable. In this sense, although Ottoman officials were equally alarmed about nationalist urges among Arab subjects, those

²⁷ Atay, *Zeytindağı*, 50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

who were executed, were seen as the victims of these perilous times. The Ottoman cadre was still unsure about the seriousness of the Arab nationalist movement. They still seem unconvinced about the means of an Arab nationalism. Maybe this was due to the belief that they did not expect Muslim citizens to yearn for an independent Arab state, and to separate themselves from the lands of the caliph. Finally, and most vital for the aims of this paper, the imbalance between the measures taken and the sympathetic narrative can be evaluated as reflection of the abovementioned feeling of unfamiliarity among those, who came from the center to the region and encountered a world that was far different from what they had expected.

3. Defending Sacred Lands

Cemal Pasha's *Hatırat* (memoirs) was published in 1920, immediately after the Pasha was sentenced to death in absentia by a special martial court in Istanbul, which was under the rule of allied occupation following the Ottoman defeat.²⁹ The court held him responsible for the executions of Arab nationalist leaders during his rule in the region. First and foremost, *Hatırat* aimed to justify the acts and deeds of Cemal Pasha during the war. Although the apologetic character of his memoirs is obvious, many recent publications have offered several witness accounts in favor of the Pasha's intentions.

As opposed to the tyrannical image of the Pasha presented by several historians, who have partially linked the rise of Arab nationalism to the executions of young Arabs during the Pasha's tenure in the region, Dotan Halevy states that "his actions were guided by a well-thought-out military logic, which in turn emanated from a broad perspective of the war's conduct."³⁰ Talha Çiçek points out the fact that before his service during WWI, Cemal Pasha was appointed to Adana and Istanbul as governor to restore order after internal crisis in each region, and that he was known as

²⁹ Eliezer Tauber, "From Young Turks to Modern Turkey: the Story of Hüseyin Aziz Akyürek (Aziz Bey), the Last Director of the Ottoman General Security Service," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 1 (2019): 37.

³⁰ Dotan Halevy, "The Rear Side of the Front: Gaza and Its People in World War I," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 5, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 39.

“a man of order” around the CUP circles.³¹ Nazan Maksudyan remarks the ways, in which the Pasha reflected his Ottomanist ideas of unity as early as during his mission in Adana in 1909.³² Yücel Güçlü calls attention to the Pasha’s vision for the future of the Empire as he quotes the pasha’s public speech in Adana on August 23, 1909. Similar to his later speech to an Arab audience during WWI, he earlier suggested to the victims of ethnic tension in Adana to forget the past, as he told them:

Let us now try to recover ourselves and show that we are capable of whatsoever waits for us. All eyes are fixed on Adana. We have to be worth of this attention. I want that everybody works. I want that all runaway victims get under shelter here in a month. We all will work, without any distinction, to rebuild Adana to give its former look. I promise, on my part, that I will give all my support, and I will do my utmost to help you in this task; and for our duty to be accomplished as it should be, I only tell you this: gentlemen, be united! I do not want to hear Armenian, Greek, Arab, Israelite. You are all brothers; you must help each other.³³

His memoirs include a very detailed report of his reign in the Arab lands. They not only intended to defend the Pasha from charges against him on the executions of Arab leaders but also to answer the criticisms about his responsibility in the defeat against the British. For him, the war was lost due to the ‘betrayal’ of Sharif Hussein of Mecca, even though the Pasha had taken all the measures for defeating the British on the battleground. Sharif Hussein had to be blamed for the decisive victory of colonial powers in the region following WWI, as the Pasha was writing down his memoirs. According to him:

Sharif’s betrayal deprived us of this happy result (the victory) and by separating two brother Muslim nations, Arab and Turk, from each other; it doomed the first to British and French domination and prompted the latter to start a desperate struggle against its most cruel enemies.³⁴

Hatırat was written in order to expose his extensive military and administrative effort as the commander in chief in the region. Therefore, it

³¹ Çiçek, “Myth of the Unionist Triumvirate,” 15.

³² Nazan Maksudyan, “1909 Adana Olayları Ertesinde Cemal Bey’in Adana Valiliği ve Osmanlılık İdeali,” *Toplumsal Tarih* 174, (June 2008), 22-8.

³³ Yücel Güçlü, *The Armenian Events of Adana in 1909: Cemal Paşa and Beyond* (Maryland: Hamilton Books, 2018), 304.

³⁴ Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat*, 149.

mentions not only military concerns but also the public works in the region. Moreover, the Pasha's impression of Arabs does not seem to be affected by the 'betrayal' of the Sharif. He frequently praises the Arab nation, and clearly notices their loyalty to the Ottoman regime until the end and their usefulness to his service. For that reason, Mesut Uyar states that "even the ardent separatist nationalists continued to fight for the Ottoman cause."³⁵

Cemal Pasha displayed the Canal Campaigns against the British forces in Egypt as evidence for the close collaboration between two nations, and the Arabs' loyalty to the Empire and the Caliphate. The solidarity on the battlefield augmented the faith in victory among the troops.³⁶ He confirmed that the idea of an Arab nationalism was far away at the beginning of 1915, the date for the first Canal Campaign. According to the Pasha: "...there had been no attempt of desertion or sign of betrayal among the transport corps, which were mainly consisting of Syrians and Palestinians."³⁷ Salim Tamari interprets this comradeship as the creation of a new synthesis made of Arabs and Turks and acceleration of the process of integration of two peoples into a common future.³⁸

After returning from the first expeditionary campaign, Cemal Pasha moved his headquarter from the heart of Damascus to the hills of Jerusalem, and dedicated himself to the preparations for the second campaign. At the time, the main prerequisite for the success of any campaign in the region was the support from the main Arab amirs, Sharif Hussein, Amir Ibn Rashid and Ibn Suud. Cemal Pasha did not seem to have a problem with the powers of Arab amirs in general, and he did not think of their power to be challenging his authority. Moreover, in his memoirs, he praised the last two amirs for their help to the cause.

Problems emerged with Sharif Hussein after Cemal Pasha demanded the assistance of the Sharif and his sons on the field. Regarding Ottoman centralist policies that were intensified under the CUP regime, especially

³⁵ Mesut Uyar, "Ottoman Arab Officers between Nationalism and Loyalty during the First World War," *War in History* 20, no. 4 (2013), 541.

³⁶ Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat*, 162-3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁸ Salim Tamari, "Muhammad Kurd Ali and the Syrian-Palestinian Intelligentsia in the Ottoman Campaign against Arab Separatism," in *Syria in World War I: Politics, Economy and Society*, ed. M. Talha Çiçek (New York: Routledge, 2015), 45.

during the war, traditional rights and autonomous power of the Sharif of Mecca were at stake. Due to technological developments, mostly with the construction of the Hejaz Railroad, Sharif Hussein had lost most of his traditional administrative role in the region. Moreover, according to the new code of provincial administration, *Vilayetname* of 1913, the autonomous administrative status of Hejaz mostly became obsolete.³⁹ After the war was announced, the British openly sought an alliance with Hussein and his sons, Abdallah and Faisal, promising an 'independent' Arab state. The terms and objectives of Arab nationalism were established during these negotiations between the British and the Sharif.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the Sharif had to gain popular support. He needed to generate a discourse and a language of Arab nationalism to a certain extent, as he was now in position of collaborating with the Christian 'infidels' against the Muslim Caliphate.⁴¹ In that sense, the struggle between the Sharif and the Pasha was not only based on military issues but also on political propaganda. *Hatırat* per se is part of that struggle. Although it was produced after the war and is highly biased as part of Cemal Pasha's attempt to justify his actions, it provided many hints about the outlines of the political struggle between the Pasha and the Sharif.

Hatırat includes a detailed report about the Sharif's practices in order to answer the accusations against the Pasha, who was blamed for causing the Arab Revolt as a result of his ruthless administration in the region. According to his memoirs, only with the revolt in June 1916, had Cemal Pasha realized that he was being fooled by the Sharif for a long time. During his negotiations with McMahon, Sharif Hussein hindered the Pasha and the central government from getting suspicious about any of his goals. While the Sharif was making his final requests to the British in January 1916, he was hosting Enver and Cemal Pasha in Mecca, flattering them precious presents.⁴²

³⁹ Mary C. Wilson, "The Hashemites, The Arab Revolt, and Arab Nationalism," in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva S. Simon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 207-11.

⁴⁰ William Ochsenwald, "Ironic Origins: Arab Nationalism in the Hijaz, 1882-1914," in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva S. Simon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 189.

⁴¹ Wilson, "The Hashemites," 213.

⁴² Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat*, 261.

Meanwhile, Cemal Pasha was trying to reply the Sharif's repeated requests of an official recognition of permanency of his family's rule in Hejaz, and a general amnesty for those who were imprisoned by the Pasha for being Arab separatists. Cemal Pasha deemed the first request as unnecessary and not of primary importance especially in consideration of the ongoing war. He also denied the second request due to the great contemporary concerns for national security. However, he had never suspected the Sharif's agenda.

After the First Canal Campaign, Cemal Pasha busied himself for a while with the separatist ideas that proliferated among Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals. Arrestment and execution of Arab nationalist leaders in Syria were mainly undertaken in April 1916. Several Arab notables were hung at the principal squares of Beirut and Damascus or were imprisoned.⁴³ The Pasha dismissed the petitions for forgiving the notables. He believed that: "Public opinion would accuse a state that forgives traitors and what follows is that others attempt treason and the religion and the state would fail."⁴⁴

Nevertheless, Arab nationalists in the Syrian Congress, which was established after the war, were mostly not in the picture before. Many of them were loyal to Ottomanists until the end of WWI.⁴⁵ For Cemal Pasha, these executions should be understandable considering the contemporary situation in the region, which was "contaminated by the propaganda of the British and the French." He believed, because of his harsh response to the insurgence, colonialist plans were delayed until the end of the war. His policies did not rely on fears of an Arab Revolt, rather they were based on fears of decentralization at the hands of colonial powers, which he believed supported Arab nationalists.⁴⁶ He was "sure that the reason for not having a revolt in Syria until the end of the war, two and a half years after Sharif Hussein declared his independence, was because of the executions that were carried out in April 1916."⁴⁷

Cemal Pasha claimed that he had never been against the idea of Arabs speaking their own language and having some rights regarding their

⁴³ Zeine, *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism*, 102.

⁴⁴ Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat*, 263.

⁴⁵ Dawn, "The Origins of Arab Nationalism," 15.

⁴⁶ M. Talha Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria: Cemal Pasha's Governorate During World War I, 1914-17* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 46.

⁴⁷ Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat*, 266.

domestic affairs.⁴⁸ His words addressing an audience, which consisted of important Arab notables in the region, in the first days of his service, represent his political ideas about the relationship between two nations, the Turks and the Arabs, during and after World War I. For the Pasha, if these two nations would be separated from each other, they would be doomed to suffer. Cemal Pasha “created a new patriotism, bringing together Turks and Arabs.”⁴⁹ Decorating his ideas with a religious framework, he defended the idea that any future conflict between these two major elements of Islamic world would cause Islam to be powerless and finally be attacked by the infidels. Needless to say, he was after creating the ideological backbone of his rule in the region as a CUP official and constituting his excuses for the executions. He assured his audience that:

*Turkism is not an enemy of Arabism, but its brother, its inseparable fellow. Turkish youth desires Arabs to be developed and to have their own rights...Do not believe the propaganda of those creatures, who sold their souls to the foreigners, who try every trick and conspiracy to invade Arab lands.*⁵⁰

Accordingly, during his service in the region, Cemal Pasha had been very careful in his relations with prominent Arab notables. He established face-to-face contacts with certain local leaders, and avoided interfering in their domestic affairs. First, he maintained close relations with Selim al-Atraché, the Druze leader, to secure his rule from the dissent of Druzes in Syria.⁵¹ Second, he tried to obtain the support of the Arab ulema and muftis of Beirut and Damascus.⁵² Third, he claimed the support of Arab “opinion makers” by arranging an expedition for a group of writers, journalists, and religious scholars from the Syrian provinces to visit the Dardanelles front in order to convince them to the great competence of the Ottoman army.⁵³ For him, the reason behind his failure was his trust for the support of the Reformists (*Islahiyyun*). Their ‘betrayal’ was disclosed by the Pasha’s intelligence service, which managed to acquire the correspondence

⁴⁸ Ibid., 211.

⁴⁹ Tamari, “Muhammad Kurd Ali,” 41.

⁵⁰ Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat*, 220-1.

⁵¹ Ibid., 226.

⁵² Ibid., 234-5.

⁵³ Tamari, “Muhammad Kurd Ali,” 36.

between party leaders. Victims of the 1916 executions were mainly among those who were involved in the party, *Hizb al-Markaziyah*, the political heart of resistance against the centralist policies of the CUP regime in the region.

Cemal Pasha's *Hatırat* is not only based on the Pasha's evaluation of the war against the enemy. It not only contains his perspectives on and excuses for the Arab Revolt and its victims, but also his allegations against Sharif Hussein of Mecca. It exposes the fact that the Ottoman mission in WWI was not only composed of the struggle on the battlefield or reestablishing national security. Cemal Pasha, the army commander, was the main individual responsible for the whole region during one of the most troubling periods for the Ottoman state throughout its history. Even though the Pasha was completely busy with the Canal Campaign against British forces and regarding security issues in the region, he was also very ambitious beyond these issues. Being one of the three leaders of the CUP regime, Cemal Pasha extended the scope of his activities, much more than he was expected.

Presence of the army required extensive physical arrangements in the region in order to fulfill every need at the camps. Nevertheless, not every infrastructural development and public work was connected to military requirements. Measures taken to sustain the quality of everyday lives of the people in the region, like restoring and constructing motor roads and railroads, Cemal Pasha's service in the region brought about an era of extensive public improvements in major Arab cities, even though the enemy was at the gates. Boulevards, public gardens, city clubs were built, what did not only improve the appearances of cities but also transformed the character of urban life. Furthermore, in the midst of the war, a successful Swiss architect, Max Zürcher, was invited to make plans for the improvement of cities and the restoration of buildings.⁵⁴ Projects were prepared for Jerusalem, Damascus, Beirut, and Aleppo. Drinking water facilities and irrigation systems for agriculture were installed. Even a report on the ancient sites of Syria and Palestine was commissioned. Moreover, an orphanage was opened for a thousand Armenian children who had lost their families during the forced migration of 1915. A school for agriculture (*Tanail Ziraat Mektebi*) was opened in the Beqaa Valley, and became famous among the Arabs. Primary schools for girls were opened

⁵⁴ Cemal Paşa, *Hatırat*, 331.

in Beirut and Damascus. Finally, Halide Edip was invited to establish a college for girls in Beirut, called *Dar-ül Nassirat*, which seemed to have made the Pasha very proud as he learned that some families took their children from the American College for Girls in Beirut to register them at *Dar-ül Nassirat*.⁵⁵

Considering *Hatırat* as a document reflecting Cemal Pasha's endeavor to defend him against allegations, the Pasha first divides Arabs into two groups, the traitor and the loyal. By doing that, he tried to prove that he is not an enemy to the Arab Nation, but to the traitors, who, he was sure, collaborated with Western powers. Second, he tried to expose that he had taken every measure to protect the locals from the damage of war. Third, he expressed how much he had done for modernizing the region despite war conditions. In fact, *Hatırat* exposed how complicated and intensive, and not only consisting of military issues, the four-year long mission of the Pasha had been. Moreover, the account depicted the extensive effort, the caliber of faith and the modern vision of an Ottoman official, even in the last days of the Empire. This vision was not limited with daily politics or the battlefield. Nonetheless, taking everything into account, it is apparent that this CUP officer's mentality was far from understanding the daily life and political objectives of Arabs, similar to most other CUP officers in the Arab world, as Falih Rıfki put it. The imaginary role that Cemal Pasha ascribed to Arabs and Turks in the future of the Empire coincided with the emergence of Arab Nationalism. Nevertheless, until the very end, many Arabs believed in the viability of the Empire. Cemal's vision still found Arab followers even after the collapse of the southern front. Furthermore, some Arab officials continued to serve the Turkish cause to prevent allied expansion in Anatolia.⁵⁶

4. Halide Edip's Mission Civilisatrice

At the beginning of the year 1916, Falih Rıfki brought a letter from Cemal Pasha to Halide Edip, inviting her to Syria to re-organize the educational

⁵⁵ Ibid., 334; Hasan Kayalı, "Wartime Regional and Imperial Integration of Greater Syria During World War I," in *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation: Bilād al-Shām From the 18th to the 20th Century*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schäßler (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998), 297.

⁵⁶ Uyar, "Ottoman Arab Officers," 542-3.

facilities in the region. At that time, Edip was already a prominent member of a nationalist organization called Turkish Hearth (*Türk Ocağı*) writing about daily politics and educational matters in the daily *Tanin*. Furthermore, due to her reformist ideas about education, she was given the responsibility of reforming girls' schools in Istanbul.

In the summer of 1916, Halide Edip left Istanbul for Syria. This was the first time for the author, who was in her thirties, to see lands beyond Izmit, a city close to the Ottoman capital. Similar to Falih Rıfkı, she also felt estranged in space and time as they traveled in the Syrian desert. Inside the car, historian Behçet Bey told her “the trail we followed was crossed by Moses and Selim the Grim.” Halide Edip stated that she felt nothing as she “was utterly disconnected with the past and the future: as (she) was as insignificant and as nameless as one single grain of sand among the myriads.”⁵⁷

She finally met with Cemal Pasha, and together they decided how to start an educational reform in Arab provinces. Edip was responsible for educational reform as well as for the reorganization of schools in the region.⁵⁸ In fact, an educational reform was already made in the region by mostly Catholic French institutions. Cemal Pasha wished to replace the French as “he had seen the strong inclination of the Arabs toward the French, based on the educational efforts of the French, and he was desirous of copying their methods in a less religious and more liberal sense.”⁵⁹ He wished to reclaim the support of Syrians, and cleanse the cultural impact of France in the region by appointing Halide Edip to redesign mass education.⁶⁰

Cemal Pasha seemed to be aware of the fact that traditional facilities of education were unproductive in imposing the modern ideology of the Ottoman state. Instead, the traditional approach in education helped widen the gap between the state and its citizens to the benefit of French colonialism. Modern education was created to inform, organize, and control the citizens in contemporary Europe and the Pasha was aware of it. Halide Edip, on the other hand, became aware of the situation of the French schools in the

⁵⁷ Halide Edip, *Memoirs of Halide Edip* (London: The Century Co, 1926), 418.

⁵⁸ Çiçek, “Myth of the Unionist Triumvirate,” 23.

⁵⁹ Halide Edip, *Memoirs*, 400.

⁶⁰ Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria*, 184.

region not as bright as to set an example for modern Ottoman institutions. For her, in these schools “the learning was limited and very much used as an apparatus of political propaganda for the French.”⁶¹ Within two weeks, Edip finalized her report concluding:

*Beirut, Lebanon, and Damascus should unite and establish one common normal school and college. Beirut should be the place for the school. Each of these provinces should have a model primary school with six grades to prepare students for the college and the normal school. Turkish, Arabic, and French should be the three languages taught.*⁶²

Halide Edip’s ideas are generally similar to those of Cemal Pasha on the ways in which Arabs and Turks establish a unity and an alliance in order to survive the fall or demise of the Ottoman Empire. Education was seen as the most prominent issue to teach these two nations how to cooperate. Halide Edip and Cemal Pasha represented their duty as to help the Arab nation to understand the “evil intentions” of Westerners, and to acknowledge that Arabs had, geographically and economically, “more common ties and interests with the Turks than with the foreigners.”⁶³ Furthermore, the Turks would assist the Arabs “to develop a national spirit.”⁶⁴

During her tenure in Cemal Pasha’s administration, Halide Edip also served as the editor and writer of *Musavver Çöl*, a bimonthly journal, which appeared in Beersheba as part of and in order to promote modern initiatives taken by Cemal Pasha. Beersheba was a little district, which was founded in the beginning of the 20th century in order to ameliorate the living conditions of the Bedouin population in the region.⁶⁵ Similarly, *Musavver Çöl* was part of the civilizing mission aimed to “enlighten” Arabs in the desert. Learning about the journal, Yusuf Akçura congratulated the publishers as being “among the vanguards of those, who aim to succeed an honorary, humanitarian, and therefore sacred mission, which is to civilize

⁶¹ Halide Edip, *Memoirs*, 401.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 402.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria*, 186.

⁶⁵ David Kushner, “The *Musavver Çöl*: An Ottoman Journal in Beersheba at the End of World War I,” in *Perspectives on Ottoman Studies: Papers from the 18th Symposium of the International Committee of Pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Studies (CIEPO)*, ed. Ekrem Causevic, Nenad Moacanin, and Vjeran Kursar (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), 168.

the desert.”⁶⁶ Second, *Musavver Çöl* aimed “to bring to its readers, both Turks and Arabs, the message of the Ottoman leadership and instill in them feelings of patriotism and sacrifice at this critical moment in the Empire’s history, when it was fighting for its very survival.”⁶⁷ *Musavver Çöl* aimed to promote a union between Turks and Arabs, and frequently warned its readers against the calamities of Western colonialism. Years later, Halide Edip evoked many of these ideas in her *memoirs* assessing the future of Arab and Turkish nations and how to fight Western hegemony.

Her appointment was understandable as she was anxious to fight against the cultural and educational hegemony of the West in Beirut and Syria. One day she visited the Maronite patriarch in the end of her mission in the region. The patriarch was clearly supporting French domination. During the meeting, she thought that “once the artificial difference of the Moslem and Christian Arab is removed (a feeling nursed and created the most by Western powers in the East), all Arabs, including the Maronites, will unite.”⁶⁸

After a long journey, Edip and fifty female teachers in her company were able to launch education in the old French college, *Der-Nassira* (Ladies of Nazareth), in Beirut, in January 1917. Other teachers in her team were selected from her own pupils, who had modernized the *evkaf* schools in Istanbul under the CUP administration. There were some two hundred applicants for a place of twenty in the entrance examinations. The applicants were from Lebanon, Beirut, and Damascus. The questions were mostly about the Arab geography, its language and culture. Seeing the exam questions, the Arab inspector of public instruction, Jasir Efendi, told Edip while laughing that if she were an Arab, she would be accused of Arab nationalism and sent to the court in Aliye. Halide Edip seemed very surprised as she found out that most of the girls, coming mostly from French schools, “knew nothing about the country they lived in and despised their own language as inferior to French.”⁶⁹ The education of Arabic became the most important mission in the new school.

⁶⁶ Gülşüm Polat, “I. Dünya Savaşında İngiliz ve Türk Propaganda Gazetelerinin Etkinliği Üzerine bir Değerlendirme (*el-Hakika ve Musavver Çöl*),” *OTAM* 36 (Fall 2014), 146.

⁶⁷ Kushner, “The Musavver Çöl,” 169.

⁶⁸ Halide Edip, *Memoirs*, 457.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 440.

Der-Nassira seems to have aroused considerable interest among Arab women in the region. An empty desk, especially in sewing and language classes, was in high demand. The school was offering Arabic, Turkish, and French classes. Moreover, fashionable uniforms were ordered, manifesting the modern, secular, and Western character of the college.

By November 1917, the Ottoman frontline was destroyed by the British and only then Halide Edip became concerned about the future of her work in the region. Nevertheless, until she was able to talk to Cemal Pasha, she had never thought that the region would fall to the British forces. Asked by the Pasha if she and her companions wanted to leave for home, she responded "...the honor of Turkish women demanded that they should stay till they were officially authorized to leave the schools."⁷⁰

Only from this moment on Edip started to follow the news from the front. Realizing that the situation was worse than she thought, she at least wanted to continue education until the last moment when she became unable to provide the necessary material conditions for the schools. She received the promise from the chief of supplies of taking necessary provisions enough for four more months. In February 1918, Edip asked the leading Americans in Beirut to take the orphanage under the protection of the Red Cross. On the fourth of March, she was able to leave Syria for Istanbul in relief. She was not only concerned for the future of the schools that she run in the region, but also was in agony regarding the future of her country. By the armistice, which was signed in Moudros in October 1918, the Ottoman Empire was no more. The government was leaving Arabs alone with their fate of falling prey to Western colonialism. As Palestine became a British Protectorate, Syria and Lebanon turned into a French Mandate.

5. Conclusion

Studies on how Arab nationalism proliferated under the CUP government have focused on the latter's growing pan-Turkist inclinations especially after the Balkan Wars. The CUP regime has been repeatedly condemned by renowned scholars of Arab nationalism for prompting Arab citizens of the Empire to separate their ways with the Ottoman Empire. George Antonius'

⁷⁰ Ibid., 460.

and Zeine Zeine's arguments are examples of this narrative. In general, they believe that Cemal Pasha's regime in Arab lands left Arabs no choice but to collaborate with European powers in order to protect themselves from the calamities that were created by centralist policies of Istanbul. For them, executions of Arab nationalists on orders of Cemal Pasha without any evident reason, precipitated the separation between Arabs and the Ottoman central government.

In this study, I have analyzed three memoirs that were written by prominent Ottoman officials after the war in order to challenge the orthodox argument that is based on the responsibility of the CUP cadre for the emergence of Arab nationalism. Memoirs of Cemal Pasha, Falih Rıfki, and Halide Edip reveal these officials' faith in restoring the contract between Arabs and the Ottoman center against Western colonialism. Being neither nationalist fanatics nor defenders of the status quo, they seem to be convinced of the requirements of modern social and everyday life. Although their interpretations of the Arabs and the future of the Ottoman rule differ from one another, they advocated for reforms in the region even during the climax of war.

Written by Falih Rıfki, a future supporter of the secularist policies of the republican regime, which followed the fall of the Ottoman State, *Zeytindağı* gives a general picture of the regime, criticizes both Arabs and Turks for the result. It emphasizes the cultural and political boundaries between the two nations. Nevertheless, Rıfki does not refrain from confirming that Arab nationalism during the war was not very popular in the region, and there was still a great collaboration between Arab and Turkish citizens of the Empire. *Zeytindağı* reflects the republican consideration of the contested relationship between Turks and Arabs. However, different from the dominant republican narrative that defames Arabs as "traitors", and holds them responsible for the collapse of the Arab front, it denies a general conflict between the two people.

Cemal Pasha, one of the CUP, writes his memoirs to justify his rule over the region, which has been considered an era of tyranny by most historians. He is also aware of the fact that his regime was not only consisting of the struggle on the battlefield against the British. He claims that the execution of Arab leaders was necessary because they were traitors both to their country and to their own people. He represents these measures as

part of his desire to keep Arab lands in peace, even though there was a violent war against the infidel going on, very close to the Arab heartland. Accordingly, he believes that both Arabs and Turks should collaborate in order to maintain the well-being of the Empire, and thus of their nations. For him, both nations were dependent on each other in order to survive. To expose his and his party's intentions about the future of the country, and to emphasize the crucial position of Arabs in the future of the Empire, Cemal Pasha tried to modernize the region and installed many public projects. He was hoping to convince Arab elites, who wanted the region to benefit from modernity. Written immediately after he was accused of war crimes, his memoirs consisted of the Pasha's defense for each of his actions in the region. Many other independent witness accounts of the acts and deeds of Cemal Pasha, such as of Muhammad Kurd Ali and Sheik al-Shukairi, support his claims.

Halide Edip, a prominent supporter of Turkish independence and the most popular female author of her time in Turkey, was responsible for one of the most prominent pillars of Cemal Pasha's modernization attempts, namely the education of the Arab children. The aim was to educate Arabs according to modern principles, and to inform them about the culture, the history, and the language of their own nation. It was believed that as these children recognized their affinities with their Turkish co-citizens, they would be more loyal to Turks, and to the Empire instead of Western powers. Even though, Edip's memoirs were published to address English readers a decade after her tenure in Beirut and Syria, it was far from apologetic. She continued to advocate Muslim resistance against the snowballing pressure of Western imperialism following WWI, and regretted the lost chance of unity between Turks and Arabs.

Historical narratives have suggested that the bond between Arabs and Turks weakened during the CUP regime, and finally fell apart under Cemal Pasha's reign in the region. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm of these Turkish officials while planning the future of how Arabs and the Turks would establish their mutual fate, indicates that the relationship between the two nations was still intact until the collapse of the Empire. Although there were cultural and political boundaries between CUP officials and Arabs during WWI, they worked tenaciously with faith in the Ottoman nation, which mainly consisted of Turks and Arabs, until the very end of the war.

The idea of an Arab nation during the war was still far from challenging the popularity of the idea of an Ottoman nation, especially having the Western enemy nearby.

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