



THE SACRIFICIAL PARADOX OF SOVEREIGNTY:  
MARTYRDOM AND  
ISLAMIST CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION  
by Pinar Kemerli

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THE SACRIFICIAL PARADOX OF SOVEREIGNTY: MARTYRDOM AND  
ISLAMIST CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

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# THE SACRIFICIAL PARADOX OF SOVEREIGNTY: MARTYRDOM AND ISLAMIST CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

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This dissertation tells the story of Islamist Conscientious Objectors (COs) in Turkey who resist the obligatory duty of conscription and cultural valorizations of martyrdom through a nonviolent civil resistance based on anti-authoritarian interpretations of Islam. Blending political theory with political ethnography and comparative politics of the Middle East, I approach this civil dissent as a potent demonstration of the uses and abuses of religious principles in democratic politics and war – both by the sovereign state and its contestants. Weaving together their anti-authoritarian interpretations of Islamic doctrines with theories and tactics of nonviolent resistance developed internationally, the COs challenge both the institution of conscription and the Turkish state's invocations of jihad and martyrdom in its military – an institution historically associated with staunch secularism in Turkey. Theoretically, I relate the issues raised by my fieldwork to debates about democratic citizenship, sovereignty, and secularism. Contrary to conventional interpretations, I find that in foundational theories of liberal democracy, military obligations of citizens are legitimized through appeals to the dominant religious values and principles in a community. Providing a broad picture of the productive engagements with non-Western political thought opened up by the political-theological perspective, the dissertation demonstrates the ambivalent but crucial roles faith and theological values play in modern politics.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author was born in Biga, Çanakkale in Turkey. She attended Boğaziçi University, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Western Languages and Literatures in 2003. She subsequently completed a Master of Arts degree in the United Kingdom from Goldsmiths College, University of London. Before beginning her doctoral studies in Government at Cornell University, she worked as a translator in Istanbul, Turkey and translated two novels of Gore Vidal, *Burr* and *Lincoln*, into Turkish. She received another Master of Arts degree from Cornell University in 2010. The following publications were a result of work conducted during doctoral study: “Religious Militarism and Islamist Conscientious Objection in Turkey,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) (Forthcoming in May 2015); Contesting Militarized Citizenship: Opposing Conscription in Turkey,” ed. Fatma Müge Göçek *Contested Spaces in Contemporary Turkey* (forthcoming in 2015); and “The Islamist Terrorist as the New Universal Enemy: Discourses on Terror at the United Nations,” ed. Claudia Verhoeven and Carola Dietze, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Terrorism* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

In loving memory of Snow Kar, November 26, 2014.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

A powerful image frequently invoked to describe the special nature of political founding and obligation is Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command. We are all familiar with the story. It first appeared in the Old Testament but was reproduced in the sacred texts of all monotheistic religions:

..God tested Abraham; he called to him, "Abraham!" And Abraham answered, "Yes, here I am!"

"Take your son," God said, "your only son, Isaac, whom you love so much, and go to the land of Moriah. There on a mountain that I will show you, offer him as a sacrifice to me."

Impossible as this command may seem for any parent, Abraham dutifully follows God's orders and goes to the fateful place. There he builds an altar and arranges woods and places his son on the wood. Just as he was about to complete God's wish with a knife raised over Isaac, Lord's angel call for him:

"Abraham, Abraham!"

He answered, "Yes, here I am."

"Don't hurt the boy or do anything to him," he said. "Now I know that you honour and obey God, because you have not kept back your only son from him."

God then sends a ram to be sacrificed, and his angel calls Abraham once again – this time to disclose to him (and to us) the ultimate meaning of this sacrificial interaction between the sovereign God and his subject, Abraham:

“I make a vow by my own name – the Lord is speaking – that I will richly bless you. Because you did this and did not keep back your only son from me, I promise that I will give you as many descendants as there are stars in the sky or grains of sand in the seashore. Your descendants will conquer their enemies. All the nations will ask me to bless them as I have blessed your descendants – all because you obeyed my command.”<sup>1</sup>

Abraham’s unwavering willingness to sacrifice what is most precious to him (his preparedness to keep nothing back and accept this tremendous loss) in order to honor his sovereign enables a founding, a new future. Because he could faithfully respond to the sovereign demand for sacrifice, there will be a new people and it will achieve permanence and glory.

Abraham’s story brings forth an understanding of politics and political obligation at the heart of which there is not the idea of self-interest or rational deliberation – values conventionally associated with liberal politics – but faith and sacrifice. On this view, “politics begins with an act of willing self-destruction that rests on faith, not reason.”<sup>2</sup> The sovereign demand for sacrifice is responded to not with reasoning, but silent acceptance in the mode of Abraham’s “Here, I am.” Sacrifice here becomes the fundamental characteristic of the relation between the sovereign and the subjects. Because the sovereign collective can always demand of “citizens that they kill and be killed for the state” (most notably in war), to be a citizen is ultimately to be able “to imagine the possibility of the sacrificial act.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, sacrifice in this context is an act

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 22: 1-15, Revised Standard Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 154.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

of freedom, not a fearful compliance with a threat, or the result of some sort of coercion. As Paul Kahn notes, “God may be sovereign, but Abraham is not a slave. The originating act rests on the faith that through death is life – the central idea of every act of sacrifice.”<sup>4</sup> Citizens sacrifice their lives for the sovereign entity to ensure its continuing existence and wellbeing. In this sense, political sacrifice is a tragic but nonetheless loving investment in the future and in life – the life of the polity/community that survives precisely because individual citizens are willing to undertake the sacrificial obligations placed on them.

As suggested above, this approach to politics that considers faith and strong passions to be the primary grounds of obligation and construes sacrifice as a necessary entailment of citizenship differs profoundly from the image of political existence and practice associated with the liberal political imaginary. Crudely put, emerging in early modern Europe and gradually transforming the global landscape, liberal political thought associates politics with the preservation of life and the maximization of the opportunities for the realization of personal goals and well being. As the conventional story goes, breaking from the dominant theologically legitimated understandings of political authority, early modern theorists of liberalism Thomas Hobbes and John Locke offered a new secular understanding of sovereignty and obligation based on a contractual agreement amongst free individuals.<sup>5</sup> In this account, the pursuit of lawful protection and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this introduction, I am simplifying this historical context, which is, of course, much more complicated than the above summarized conventional account. For instance, although the early modern emergence of liberalism is credited for breaking with the previous theological legitimation of politics, other traditions of thought such as Machiavelli’s civic republicanism attempted a similar break before the emergence of liberalism. Moreover, during the early modern period itself, as Victoria Kahn argues, “numerous writers posed serious challenges to the divine legitimation of political power.” It is worth quoting her at length: “The political influence of papacy in Italy, the religious wars on the continent, and sectarian strife in England all prompted contemporaries to rethink the relationship between religion and the state. In one strain of this rethinking, a number of radical religious movements across Europe stressed the subversive political potential of the theological appeal to conscience and argued for a religiously

other benefits are the primary motivations that lead individuals of the pre-political condition (the state of nature) to generate a sovereign entity that would thenceforth represent and protect them all. Challenging the justification of monarchical and aristocratic forms of governance based on the divine rights of kings or custom, liberal theory argues – in a revolutionary way – that a legitimate government is based on the consent of the people, who freely assume certain obligations towards the sovereign collective in exchange for vital benefits. Thus, for liberalism, understood in this conventional sense, citizenship obligations derive from a rational exchange prompted by the pursuit of personal security and self-seeking deliberation, rather than emotional attachments, passions, or faith the sources and operations of which are beyond rational justification – such as Abraham’s sacrifice.

As a result of this foundational emphasis on self-preservation and rational interest, liberal theory is often criticized for being unable to account for, and inspire, strong citizenship obligations such as sacrifice. This is a significant problem particularly because although liberal theory may fall silent in the face of sacrifice, liberal states must impose on their citizens many obligations that either require the forfeiture of individual interests or involve significant risks to personal well being and sometimes life. While examples range from the obligation to pay taxes to the expectation that all would abide by electoral outcomes (no matter how unfavorable they may be for their private interests), the most dramatic instance of this imposition is undoubtedly conscription and military mobilization – the primary focus of this dissertation. Able citizens of even the most liberal states are called to defend the state and participate in military mobilization when

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inspired republican, protodemocratic, or anarchist critique of the state.” Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 184.

situations so require, demonstrating the paradoxical status of sacrificial political obligations within liberal political thought.

For theorists such as Michael Walzer and Paul Kahn this sacrificial problem seems insoluble. Quoting young Hegel, Walzer suggests that an individualist system of thought that restricts political purposes to personal safety, physical welfare, and the appropriation and enjoyment of physical objects cannot accommodate sacrifice:

Then, the preservation of the city can only be important [to its citizens] as a means to the preservation of their property and its enjoyment. Therefore to expose themselves to the danger of death would be to do something ridiculous, since the means, death, would forthwith annul the end, property and enjoyment.<sup>6</sup>

But it is Hobbes's account of liberalism that demonstrates the problematic status of sacrifice for liberalism with uttermost clarity. Reflecting on Hobbes's arguments on national defense and whether citizens are obliged to participate in it, Walzer writes:

For Hobbes, the end of the state is individual life. That is both its primary purpose as an institution and the primary aim of each and every man who participates in its foundation and preservation. The brief moment of political creativity and the subsequent eternity of obedience both have a purely instrumental significance: the goal to which both are directed is survival, or rather, security, which is survival along with freedom from the terrible fear of violent death. A man who dies for the state defeats his only purpose in forming the state [preservation of his life]: death is the contradiction of politics. A man who risks his life for the state accepts the insecurity, which it was the only end of his political obedience to avoid: war is the failure of politics. Hence, there can be no political obligation either to die or to

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted Ibid., 89.

fight. Obligation disappears in the presence of death or of the fear of death.<sup>7</sup>

As we shall further examine in the first chapter of this dissertation, Hobbes's disproportionate emphasis on the pursuit of self-preservation as the primary political motivation indeed enables a quite transparent theoretical demonstration of liberalism's sacrificial paradox. But Walzer claims that the problem is not restricted to Hobbes and his account of liberalism. It reappears in "later liberal theorists, who retain his [Hobbes's] individualist foundations – even when they give up (as Spinoza had already given up), his narrow emphasis upon bodily security and the fear of violent death."<sup>8</sup> From Locke to Rawls, the sacrificial dilemma haunts liberal theory, and even when an attempt is made to reassert a political obligation to die for the state, the assertion remains either "inconsistent" with the general pattern of thought advanced by a theorist, or is re-framed as a secondary, freely acquired, and "private" obligation which appears to have "nothing to do with politics."<sup>9</sup>

Locke's attempt to justify an obligation to die for the state helps clarify this point. Though the discussion of this topic is by no means clear (or adequate) in *The Second Treatise of Government*, Locke invokes a possible obligation to defend the community twice in the book. The most direct engagement comes in Chapter 11 paragraph 139, where the characteristics of absolute but rational exercise of power is discussed.<sup>10</sup> Locke here singles out the military as the site where, unlike anywhere else, absolute power and absolute obedience is legitimate and necessary. And this is the case even when the

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Walzer, *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War and Citizenship* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), 82.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 88-9.

<sup>10</sup> John Locke, "The Second Treatise of Government," in *The Selected Political Writings of John Locke*, ed. Paul E. Sigmund (London, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), Chapter 11, parag. 139.

commands of the superiors may be “unreasonable” and involve risks to soldiers’ well being:

For the preservation of the army, and in it of the whole commonwealth, requires an absolute obedience to the command of every superior, and it is justly death to disobey or dispute the most dangerous or unreasonable of them.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, even when the command is “to march up to the mouth of a cannon, or stand in a breach, where he is almost sure to perish,” a soldier is required to obey for “such a blind obedience is necessary to that end for which the commander has his power, viz. the preservation of the rest.”<sup>12</sup>

However, this proviso holds only for soldiers, not generally for the citizens. As Walzer observes Locke “writes only of the obligation of soldiers,” and “says nothing of the obligation of citizens or subjects to become soldiers.”<sup>13</sup> We never find in *The Second Treatise* a discussion of conscription or whether all citizens would be obliged to fight (and what would motivate them) under specific circumstances.<sup>14</sup> In the absence of such clarifications, Locke’s argument cannot be interpreted as a theoretical justification of a citizenship obligation to die for the state.

Locke’s second invocation of a duty to preserve others has an ambiguous character as well. Discussing the law of nature that regulates the liberties individuals have in the state of nature, Locke here gives the natural law a “collectivist formulation.”<sup>15</sup> He

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Chapter 11, parag. 139.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Chapter 11, parag. 139. Interestingly, while he can command death in this way, the commander is not allowed to “command that the soldier give him one penny of his money.” Despite this meticulous regard for soldier’s property, it is clear, however, that Locke does not worry much about the liberal state’s demand for self-sacrifice in defense of the country.

<sup>13</sup> Walzer, *Obligations*, 110.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 110. In the absence of such a discussion, Walzer assumes “what seems most likely: that he [Locke] accepted contemporary recruitment practices,” of his time, namely, the drafting of the poor.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 89.



suggests that the law of nature dictates:

Everyone, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station willfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of the mankind.<sup>16</sup>

While Locke now posits something like a natural law obligation to preserve the mankind, this is certainly not an ultimate obligation. It is true that a duty to defend others who are in need is invoked, but the primacy of self-preservation (“when his own preservation comes not in competition”) is also reiterated. Moreover, other theoretical issues complicate the practical application of this duty. For instance, the invocation of “mankind” as opposed to the members of a particular community renders the conditions of the exercise of this obligation after the transition to political society unclear and ambiguous. What kind of a citizenship practice, undertaken in a concrete state would qualify as the “preservation of mankind”? Would there be any concrete stakes to that action? In relation to this issue, it is also unclear how civil laws would incorporate and preserve this law of nature and its requirements. In sum, these kinds of attending ambiguities significantly complicate the possibility of deriving sacrificial citizenship obligations from this law of nature.

Ultimately, Walzer concludes that any theory, which, like Locke’s, “begins with the absolute independence of freely willing individuals and goes on to treat politics and the state as an instrument to the achievement of individual purposes,” would by its very nature fail to justify ultimate obligations.<sup>17</sup> For sacrifice is the most dramatic disavowal of the self-centered individualism that structures the arguments raised in the foundational

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<sup>16</sup> Locke, “The Second Treatise,” Chapter 2, parag. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 89.

accounts of liberalism envisioned by theorists like Hobbes and Locke. It is only when the existence of a collective, and what it stands for, is valued more than one's individual life and needs, that sacrifice can become a possibility. Thus, lacking a public ethos capable of prioritizing the existence of the broader collective, liberalism would be unable to justify sacrifice.

And, as the above-described Lockean example demonstrates, when it does attempt to account for sacrifice, the proposed solutions would likely generate new paradoxes.<sup>18</sup> That is, while theorists may make ambiguous concessions to resolve the sacrificial paradox inflicting liberal theory, so long as its individualist interpretation of political being and motivation is not thoroughly transformed, liberal thought seems unable to overcome the sacrificial dilemma.<sup>19</sup>

But this does not mean that liberal states cannot wage war effectively, or there is no invocation of sacrificial death in liberal theory. Walzer accepts that ethical or other reasons may be promoted to assist the state in a potential military mobilization. This means that at times of war (or when other less dramatic forms of sacrifice are necessary), liberal states are required to shape the social context in such a way that individuals would come to perceive the duty to fight for the state as a freely acquired obligation and a means of fulfilling some form of private end. But, according to Walzer, this would not be a *political* solution to the sacrificial paradox – as people would not be asked to die “for

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted Ibid., 89.

<sup>19</sup> Similarly, when 19<sup>th</sup> Century liberals such as Bentham and J.S. Mill addressed the issue, they opted to discuss not what would motivate citizens to fight (or whether the liberal state's demand for sacrifice is justifiable) but rather whether standing armies pose threats to individual liberties. J.S. Mill, for instance, thought so but he also recommended compulsory military training for every man. Nonetheless, he did not provide a justification for the liberal state's right to demand sacrifice. Thus, as April Carter has observed, the problem of military service has been “peripheral” to the interests of liberals such as Locke and J. S. Mill, and the issue has come to be debated in footnotes to their works and in their private correspondence. Cf. April Carter, “Liberalism and the Obligation to Military Service,” *Political Studies* XLVI (1998): 68-81.

*public* reasons.”<sup>20</sup> At the end, unable to resolve the dilemma through its own theoretical tools, liberalism remains incapable of commanding sacrifice despite the fact that liberal states may utilize other strategies to maintain an effective defense of the homeland.

## II.

Of course, there is something inconsistent about liberalism’s unwillingness to engage the issue of sacrifice and the values associated with it while liberal societies do not have a problem with waging war. Paul Kahn’s critique focuses on this point and emphasizes that political sacrifice is not really, and certainly not always, a problem in the life of liberal societies.<sup>21</sup> Drawing upon examples from American history – beginning with the sacrifices during the revolution and expanding to the war on terror – Kahn points out that liberal societies often “live comfortably with their long history of citizen sacrifice in national wars.”<sup>22</sup> And “much of this past remains vivid in people’s political imagination, “endlessly reinforced by both popular media and scholarly work.”<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, Kahn continues, as opposed to the dominant theoretical interpretation, for the majority of Americans, political order is experienced not simply “as the application of general laws arrived at through a democratic process,” but “as a source of the ultimate meaning and a potential demand on life.”<sup>24</sup> It is this intense and existentially charged experience that informs Americans’ “understanding of their relationship to national history and destiny,” and enables them, when called to do so, to respond to the

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<sup>20</sup> Walzer, *Obligations*, 89. Emphasis mine.

<sup>21</sup> See also Talal Asad’s thought provoking discussion of this topic in *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Kahn, *Political Theology*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 121-2.

political demand for sacrifice. Given this actual incorporation of sacrifice within nationalist discourses and practices and popular culture in liberal societies, why then is there a theoretical disavowal of it?

For Paul Kahn, the crux of the problem lies in liberal theory's attempt to "disenchant" the political sphere – to borrow Max Weber's famous formulation.<sup>25</sup> This perspective puts the emphasis on the problems liberalism's secular account of human agency and demystification of politics generates for its ability to understand the strong bonds commanded by beliefs, religious faith, and affect in modern secular societies. Rather than an envisioned consent to a particular politico-legal arrangement, it is often these bonds lying deep in social conscious and culture that command the kinds of strong attachments capable of explaining and provoking sacrifice. Because liberalism is not sufficiently attentive to such bonds that reach beyond the realm of reasonable exchange, it misses the crucial need for, and relation to, the transcendent in political life.<sup>26</sup>

In Paul Kahn's view, this results in liberal theory's inability to correctly understand the character of "the political" as it informs the life practices and beliefs of ordinary citizens.<sup>27</sup> More specifically, equating political to "the rational" or "interest" – rather than deep commitment and faith as displayed by the example of Abraham's obedience –, liberalism refuses to see the political community as "a source of meanings that steps into the place of the sacred," and is thus forced to condemn much of our political practice as simply pathology."<sup>28</sup> While Kahn draws his examples exclusively from American history, this dismissive response is, of course, not restricted to American

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>26</sup> Kahn, *The Future of Illusion*, 2-3.

<sup>27</sup> Kahn, *Political Theology*, 121.

<sup>28</sup> Kahn, *Political Theology*, 121.

practices and modes of being that do not fit the liberal model of secular and rational political agency. As we have seen numerous times in the aftermath of 9/11, Islamic politics and sensibilities that deviate from the pattern of rational behavior envisioned in liberal theory have been condemned as apolitical pathologies. This pathologizing tendency is especially pronounced with respect to sacrificial political practices that takes us out of our existential comfort zone and forces us to rethink the conventional terms and goals of political existence and community. But instead of engaging with this important political phenomena and trying to understand and explain its political structure and operations, liberalism disavows its political character and legitimacy, thereby foreclosing critique. Thus, agreeing with Walzer, Paul Kahn concludes that although liberal societies (like all other societies) will need, and sometimes even celebrate, citizen sacrifice, “we will never find an adequate explanation of the politics of sacrifice in liberal theory.”<sup>29</sup>

To further dismantle liberalism’s theoretical impasse that results not only in the refusal to engage an important dimension of political life (sacrifice) but also misconstrues its fundamental characteristics as “pathology,” Paul Kahn thus adopts the political-theological approach.<sup>30</sup> Before we proceed further, it should be noted that Paul Kahn is far from being alone in criticizing liberalism’s inability to account for strong politics through the lens of political theology. Especially in the last several decades, there has been a proliferating interest in the political theological argument, understood broadly as

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>30</sup> As Hent de Vries notes the term “political theology” was first used in the works of Marcus Varro and Saint Augustine, and then was adopted by Spinoza as “theologico-politicus” in 17<sup>th</sup> Century. In 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it reappears in the works of Guiseppe Mazzini and Mikhail Bakunin. For a more thorough discussion of this history, see Hent de Vries, “Introduction,” in *Political Theologies*, ed. de Vries and Lawrance E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 1-91.

the theological legitimation of political authority and religious dimensions of political life. What promoted this rise was primarily the perceived crisis of contemporary liberal democracy – a crisis that involves not only the inability to describe and sustain strong political practices, but more broadly, as Victoria Kahn and Jeffrey W. Robbins has observed, one that also derives from liberalism’s inability to offer a substantive defense of its own principles in the face of rising challenges.<sup>31</sup>

The most prominent recent challenge to liberal political imaginary has been political religions. First, the remarkable increase in religious socio-political movements all around the world in the aftermath of the Cold War gradually brought into question the liberal narrative of progressive secularization of modern societies, especially in the West.<sup>32</sup> From Poland to Latin America, it has become clear that religion operates as an important actor in the modern world, contributing to the shaping of the public sphere – rather than being contained within the private sphere. A rising political Islam, which has become a significant global force during this period – and especially after the 9/11 attacks against the United States – further necessitated the re-questioning of the liberal neglect of the affective and theological dimensions of politics. Importantly, this period also saw an attendant proliferation in global radical activism involving the deployment of sacrificial practices (such as suicide bombings), thus rendering political sacrifice a quite urgent and vexing political problematic. In response to these developments, critics have begun to argue that liberalism has failed not only to address the religious dimensions of politics within Western liberal democracies, but also “has been equally incapable of addressing

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2. See also Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011)

<sup>32</sup> For a good summary of this transformation and its broader consequences for the secularization theory, see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

jihad.”<sup>33</sup> In this vein, liberalism’s ability to respond to the transforming dynamics of a “post-secular” world where religion has neither withered away nor is content to remain private have come under doubt, facilitating the increasing rise in the scholarly interest in political theology.<sup>34</sup>

Turning now to the theoretical content and stakes of the political-theological argument, it should first be acknowledged that the classical formulation of political theology comes from Carl Schmitt’s 1922 book with the same title, *Political Theology*. And like the current interest in political theology, Schmitt’s original formulation was developed in response to a historical crisis – that of the Weimer republic during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, which eventually led to the collapse of the Weimer regime and the rise of Nazi Germany, the latter of which Schmitt controversially became a defender.<sup>35</sup> Problematizing the prevalent narrative in the history of political thought that the modern theory of the state (and modernity in general), emerged through the secularization of political authority and the privatization of religion, Schmitt argued that secular political principles and practices in fact have theological origins and structure:

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>34</sup> For a thorough discussion of this revival and its grounds, see Hand de Vries’s “Introduction.”

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the historical background, see George Schwab’s Introduction to *Political Theology, Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, by Carl Schmitt (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), xxxvii-1.

analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries.<sup>36</sup>

Schmitt here describes the methodology of the political-theological inquiry, which involves a genealogical and an analogical aspect. The genealogical aspect refers to the exposition of “the remnants of belief that are attached to our political concepts and maintained in our political practices.”<sup>37</sup> Through careful historical research, we can trace these beliefs back to their original theological roots, and thereby complicate the established secular narratives blurring this history and gain a more accurate understanding of political ideologies. The analogical method, on the other hand, involves creative association – more specifically, the recognition and framing of the similarities between the structures of meaning invoked by theological concepts and political principles/values. For instance, claiming, as Schmitt does, that the exception in politics is analogous to the miracle in theology means that our understanding of the political exception draws upon the web of meanings associated with the miracle in the theological outlook – which we may not personally share but have been initiated to as a result of living in complex communities.<sup>38</sup>

In light of this description, it becomes clear that Paul Kahn’s above summarized critique of liberalism and its inability to account for the genuine nature of politics is deeply influenced by Schmitt’s formulation and methodology. Accordingly, Kahn argues that despite the widespread dedication to liberal theory in the United States, the popular sovereign is “the mystical corpus of the state, the source of the ultimate meaning of

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<sup>36</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.

<sup>37</sup> Kahn, *Political Theology*, 106.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.



citizens,” and as such, it has the power to decide on the exception (as Schmitt’s sovereign).<sup>39</sup> It is this ultimate and sacred characteristic of sovereign power that gives it the right to demand sacrifice (often at exceptional moments such as war) and enables citizens to find the emotional resources to respond to it. Ultimately, what seems to attract Kahn most to political theology in his critique of liberal theory (and his analysis of American sovereignty) is this approach to politics that puts sacrifice at the center of the sovereign relation.

This focus on sacrifice as the central political relation is also what makes political theology important for the purposes of this dissertation. To summarize the arguments thus far raised and that will accordingly inform the following discussion, we have seen (in the first part of the introduction) that sacrifice turns out to be an insoluble paradox for the liberal political imaginary primarily because of liberalism’s a) codification of political existence as a rational and self-seeking pursuit of individual security and personal achievements, and b) the attendant disavowal of the place of, and the necessity for, the transcendent/the sacred/the metaphysical in politics. Challenging this perspective, the political-theological perspective emphasizes the necessity of the element of transcendence in politics, and approaches sacrifice as the fundamental characteristic of the relation between the sovereign and its subjects – thus assisting the inquiry into what really makes citizens give up their lives for their communities and abstract ideals, a question we will focus in this dissertation.

More specifically, the political theological argument suggests that politics and theology has a structural relationship wherein theology “names the ongoing problem of legitimating or shoring up the power of the state by securing the allegiance of the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 121.

subjects.”<sup>40</sup> This is an ongoing problem precisely because the state (as the institutional embodiment of sovereignty) is the only entity in modern life that could (and must) demand of its citizens not only minor sacrifices but the readiness to die, thereby revealing the existential stakes involved in politics.<sup>41</sup> And to do so, it must be perceived as something more than the product of a contract whose meaning and purpose is restricted to the maintenance of the legal order in which citizens can safely pursue their individual goals. Put differently, the political theological argument emphasizes that the political sovereign must be able to command the force of the transcendent so that it can become an object of admiration and faith for the protection of which people may, if need be, risk their lives. Thus, rather than the idea of consent or the pursuit of self-preservation, political theology places the pledge to sacrifice at the origin of political experience, rendering notions such as passion, belief, faith, and so forth the primary grounds of genuine obligation.<sup>42</sup>

However, despite its emphasis on the theological outlook, the political theological perspective is not a project to authorize religion with the power of determining governmental policies or waging war. As Graham Hammill emphasizes, in political theology, politics remains the constituent power: politics constitute the state and decide (to a large extent) on what kind of a shape the religious dimensions of political life should take within a particular community.<sup>43</sup> This means the political theological argument is necessarily a part of the broader problematic of secularism, understood as the political

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<sup>40</sup> Kahn, *The Future of Illusion*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> See also George Schwab’s discussion in Introduction to *Political Theology*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Kahn, *Political Theology*, 28.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Kahn, *The Future of Illusion*, 5. As we will see in the latter parts of the dissertation – and especially in the last chapter –, this political-theological aspiration to decide the exact shape the religious dimensions of political life should take is not always a realizable goal. Like all ideological elements of a regime, the proposed theological structure of a polity could be challenged by oppositional movements. Hence the risks involved in political theological projects.

arrangement of the relationship between religion and politics. In this sense, as Paul Kahn notes, political theology is also a part of the modernist project, but its point is that the institutional separation of religion and politics is “misunderstood if it is read as the disenchantment of the political world.”<sup>44</sup> To be able to command strong obligations that help preserve the state and inspire sacrifice, sovereignty must be imbued with some form of sacred aura, and appear as the locus of passionate devotion – hence its emphasis on the need in politics for a mystical foundation (to borrow from Derrida), a political myth, or religious supplement that is capable of capturing people’s hearts and minds, and thereby provoking the performance of sacrificial political practices.

### III.

The above-summarized theoretical insights relating to the paradox of sacrifice in liberalism and the methodologies adopted to explore them (such as the political-theological argument) are derived largely from the scholarly engagement with a Eurocentric and Judeo-Christian context. This has to do not only with the fact that liberal theorizing and the political theological situation that gave rise to it have European origins (the European religious wars of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century) – which need not determine the subsequent elaborations, journey, and adaptations of the theoretical models thereby advanced –, but also because of the scholarly choices made by theorists who address these issues (including Paul Kahn whose work was examined above).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kahn, *Political Theology*, 19.

<sup>45</sup> Indeed, especially the literature on political theology is deeply embedded within the recent European history and the religio-political issues it gave rise to. What commonly features in this literature is the works of the influential 20<sup>th</sup> century analysts who, following Schmitt, contributed to the development of the political-theological approach such as Leo Strauss, Ernst Kantorowicz, Ernst Cassirer, and Walter Benjamin – and the historical context that they focused on. See also, for instance, Victoria Kahn’s most recent proposal to approach political theology from the perspective of the “Jewish question”: “I use the

While informed by the important insights provided by this literature, my aim in this dissertation is to go beyond it and explore the sacrificial paradox that lies at the heart of modern liberal democracy through the lens of a different theoretical and historical conjuncture. In particular, I will examine what kinds of theoretical strategies a majority Muslim secular democracy, situated at the threshold of Europe and the Near East, the modern Turkey, followed in its attempt to legitimize the sacrificial obligations of citizenship. To do this, I turn first to the works of the two early modern social contract theorists, Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and examine their complicated engagements with the problem of sacrifice within the context of formulating, respectively, a liberal and democratic theory of political obligation (deriving from the social contract). As I hope to make clear in the course of the dissertation, these theoretical formulations were developed to a large extent to manage the challenge of religion without giving up the important assistance it can provide the state with – especially with respect to cultivating sacrificial citizenship dispositions. And as theoretical models for rearranging the relationship between religion and politics under secular governance, their relevance and impact cannot be restricted to the immediate historical conditions that engendered them and the particular theological traditions they took as reference. The dissertation aims to illustrate this claim by mapping out the operations of these theoretical models within the context of Turkish modernization, which, as we shall see, also demonstrates some of the crucial problems attending them.

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Jewish question to refer to this constellation of issues, which prompted Strauss, Benjamin, Kantorowicz, and Cassirer, and others to turn to the early modern period to rethink the relationship between religion, culture, and the state.” Kahn, *The Future of Illusion*, 19-20. Without denying the world historical significance of this period, I think that this extensive focus on this historical moment and the literature it gave rise to also restricts the theoretical debate to a Eurocentric and Judeo-Christian context.

In the following, I will offer a more detailed overview of the dissertation and its broader contributions. But let me first explain why I think the turn to the early modern moment – especially the emergence of the social contract – is important for the inquiry into sacrifice. In the history of political thought, political sacrifice becomes a distinct theoretical problem in the early modern period when theological doctrines such as the divine mandate to govern were no longer convincing (and was being challenged) and politics began to be seen as the exercise of rational human agency in pursuit of individual security and welfare. Put differently, once there was no longer an immediate theological justification, or reward, for dying for the state – God’s representative on earth – and the new politics began to be associated with the promise of life and protection, sacrifice and the political demand for it emerged as a paradox, requiring new justifications. In this sense, the focus on Hobbes’s and Rousseau’s engagements with sacrifice and how to justify the sacrificial obligations of citizenship enables a kind of genealogical investigation into this important problematic that continues to haunt contemporary politics.<sup>46</sup>

Accordingly, the first chapter of the dissertation examines Hobbes’s theorization of sovereignty and political obligations. I focus especially on his analysis of national defense in light of his historical reflections on the English Civil War and the actions of those who partook in it. While agreeing with critics (such as Michael Walzer and Paul Kahn) that the strong emphasis on self-preservation raises significant problems for the

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<sup>46</sup> Victoria Kahn argues that contemporary critics tend to neglect the theoretical significance of the early modern context, especially with respect to the political theological perspective. But, in contrast, from Schmitt to Benjamin, all of the aforementioned theorists of political theology were “acutely aware of the momentous significance of this earlier historical moment, and returned to this moment to discuss the genealogy of the modern problem of political theology.” Kahn, *The Future of Illusion*, 2.

justification of sacrificial political obligations in Hobbes's account of liberalism, I argue that Hobbes, in fact, was aware of this problem, and in the course of his later writing, attempted to overcome it by offering significant modifications to *Leviathan's* arguments. More specifically, he was led first to acknowledge the need for faith in politics, and then to propose a controversial reconstruction of Christianity through a robust pedagogical reform. This radically transformed version of Christianity was intended to produce "a love of obedience" and devotion to the secular state and thus enable the effective mobilization of the people and the defense of the homeland. Thus, the solution to the paradox of sacrifice ultimately required Hobbes to make a sustained appeal to people's religious sensibilities through the use of this new public religion, not to self-interest and reason. In this sense, and against established opinion, I suggest that Hobbes offered a complex and controversial theoretical strategy to resolve the paradox of sacrifice, and in the course of doing this also provided a new way of thinking about the relationship between religion and politics. As I will argue, it is this Hobbesian strategy that has been crucial for subsequent processes of secularization (perhaps even more than Locke's classic formulations of secularism) and continues to shape contemporary regulations of religion – especially in social contexts where the secular state pursues a programme of modernization through religious reform.

The second chapter turns to the discussion of Rousseau, who, unlike Hobbes, was remarkably clear about the sacrificial demands of the new contractual politics, and the need for an appeal to religion to enable people to manage these demands. While praising the emphasis in Hobbes's proposed solution on the necessity of bringing religion under state control, Rousseau thought that a solution to the sacrificial dilemma cannot be

produced from within Christianity – no matter how radically the sovereign may restructure it. Thus moving beyond Hobbes’s position, Rousseau suggests that the sovereign must construct a purely civil profession of faith – a civil religion that will generate devotion to the state and cultivate the patriotic dispositions required for strong citizenship.

The theory of civil religion is, of course, a centerpiece of the civic-republican tradition, and other republican authors before Rousseau, most especially Machiavelli, provided seminal accounts of how religion can be empowered to enhance citizenship.<sup>47</sup> In the *Discourses on Livy* in particular, Machiavelli praises Roman civil religion, emphasizing the role played by Roman practices of oath taking, auguries, and auspices in the generation of martial virtues and discipline.<sup>48</sup> Through this example, Machiavelli emphasizes the necessity for republics to “reinterpret Christianity in such a way that it secures the political advantages that the Romans were so adept at exploiting through a judicious manipulation of religious beliefs and practices” – thus, as Ronald Beiner put it, he recommends the paganization of existing Christianity so that it could operate as a form of civil religion.<sup>49</sup>

While emerging from within this civic-republican tradition, Rousseau’s account of civil religion differs from it. As has been pointed out above, Rousseau disagreed with the idea that existing Christianity could be redeemed and support republican politics. But, perhaps more importantly, as I will argue, Rousseau’s account of civil religion was developed not simply in relation to the patriotic rituals designed to provide devotion to

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<sup>47</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the civil religion tradition, see Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> See in particular Book I, Chapters 11-15.

<sup>49</sup> See Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 21.

the state (as described in the last chapter of *The Social Contract*), but also to the theologically grounded and more personalized faith of the Savoyard Vicar, namely, the “religion of conscience” theorized in *Emile*. With its individualized ethical-theology and emphasis on conscience Rousseau’s religion of conscience mediates between the public rituals of civil religion and individual sensibilities, and thus aims to generate a deeper moral transformation – one that intends to cultivate a strong sense of duty and thereby prepare people for the difficult obligations of political life. On this basis, the chapter will suggest that Rousseau’s theoretical solution to the problem of sacrifice – the theory of civil religion – involves a complex and deeper engagement with theological principles and ethics than is conventionally assumed. As we shall see in the latter parts of the dissertation, it seems to be this complicated Rousseauian legacy that helps account for the surprising accommodations within contemporary civil religions of theological principles and ethics that are grounded not in a civic faith but monotheistic religion.

#### IV.

Following this theoretical exploration, I situate the sacrificial problematic within the historical specificity of modern Turkey. Approaching this issue through the historical lens of Turkey and how this relatively young republic (emerging in 1923 after the fall of the Ottoman Empire) cultivates citizenship dispositions that can accommodate sacrifice has several advantages. First, and most obviously, Turkey’s situation at the intersection of Europe and the Near East – modernity and subalternity – enables a broader perspective on the theoretical solutions advanced by liberalism and civil religion to the problem of how to generate strong citizenship obligations. Examining this issue on the basis of



Turkish secular modernization, taking place at the margins of European modernity – and thus being influenced by and also influencing it –, enables a sustained focus on the proposed solutions as theoretical models that travel to non-Western contexts – and develop and possibly become more transparent as a result of this journey.

More specifically, the analysis of Turkish modernization (modeled on the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century European examples) which involved the combined pursuit of both the Hobbesian and Rousseauian strategies to regulate religion's influence helps illustrate a) the necessary connection between these two strategies and b) that although it is the specificity of Christianity and the political-theological situation of European modernity that gave rise to these strategies, their significance and effects are not limited by these contexts. Thus, the special characteristics and consequences of Hobbes's and Rousseau's influential solutions could be refreshingly and as – if not more – transparently demonstrated through a focus on their operations beyond the Judeo-Christian context and imaginary. I will unpack these arguments below.

Let me begin with the special character of socio-political modernization pursued in Turkey. The modern Turkish nationalism, with its controversial historical and linguistic myths and rich array of patriotic rituals, is often analyzed as a remarkable example of a modern civil religion.<sup>50</sup> Envisioned as a crucial part of the secular modernization programme the emergent republic undertook under the guidance of its founding father Ataturk, the new civil religion aimed to fulfill the political role and sociopolitical function Islam used to serve in the Ottoman Empire, and thus provide

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<sup>50</sup> John A. Coleman, "Civil Religion," *Sociological Analysis*, 31: 2 (1970): 67-77; Robert Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980)

sanctity to the republican institutions and norms.<sup>51</sup> Complicating this conventional argument, I show in the third chapter of the dissertation that the construction of civil religion in Turkey involved not only the imaginings of new national myths and patriotic rituals emphasized in conventional accounts of Turkish civil religion, but also, and more controversially, the Hobbesian strategy of re-structuring traditional religion in such a way that it comes to support the modern secular state. That is, the Turkish Republic undertook a systematic re-construction of Islam itself to render this religion compatible with Turkish nationalism, and thereby solidify and strengthen the affective grounds of the new civil religion. The “official Islam” selectively emphasized the kinds of beliefs and rituals that promoted obedience to the state and patriotic sensibilities. As we shall see, it was especially Islamic traditions of jihad and martyrdom that were incorporated within the discourses and practices of the new civil religion, and were systematically promoted through the national school curricula and universal conscription – the institution that is most readily associated with nationalist sacrifice and republican citizenship.

The development of the Turkish civil religion through the combined pursuit of patriotic myth making and the reconstruction of traditional religion also provides a striking demonstration of the dissertation’s broader theoretical argument with respect to civil religion. That is, Rousseau’s influential account of civil religion is not purely a “civil” profession of faith, but includes a sustained and deep engagement with monotheistic theologies and ethical systems. As I hope to show along the course of the dissertation, this latter inclusion a) is necessitated primarily by the difficulties produced by the inevitable sovereign demand for sacrifice in political life, and religion’s apparent ability to provide effective and convincing answers to the existential questions

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).

concerning death and suffering, and b) illustrates that modern projects of civil religion are required to also pursue the Hobbesian strategy of reconstructing religion and religious sensibilities so that they become compatible with secular sovereignty. Thus, although theorists and founders of civil religion may on the surface seem hostile to the established religious traditions in a particular country – as Rousseau and Atatürk were hostile to, respectively, Christianity and Islam – they are nonetheless led to make compromises, and involve these traditions (albeit in modified form) in their projects to resolve the sacrificial paradox.

Finally, it should be noted that in making this argument – that the account of civil religion that Rousseau offers in fact requires some form of engagement with theology and religious ethics –, the dissertation complicates the tendency to present the idea of civil religion and liberalism as opposite alternatives. As Ronald Beiner summarized, according to the conventional narrative, liberalism “is the rejection of the idea of empowering religion even for the sake of enhancing good citizenship, and different theorists of liberalism offer different (but perhaps mutually reinforcing) arguments for rejecting the civil religion idea.”<sup>52</sup> Disputing the existence of such a sharp binary, I suggest that liberalism and civil religion interact with each other much more closely than this established account allows.

While Beiner agrees with this suggestion, according to him the consequences of this interaction are more or less restricted to the theoretically tension-ridden existence of “liberal civil religions.” Drawing upon the responses of, for instance, Montesquieu and Tocqueville, to the civil religion tradition, he argues that these responses give one a better appreciation of the fact that “there *is* such a thing as liberal civil religion, although its

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<sup>52</sup> Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 2.

existence as an intellectual possibility seems at first glance paradoxical.”<sup>53</sup> I find the theoretical consequences of the intellectual dialogue between liberalism and civil religion to be much more complicated and expansive than that. In particular, I disagree with Beiner’s claim that modern secularism as theorized by the liberal tradition “nearly put an end to the dimension of theorizing expressed in the civil religion tradition.”<sup>54</sup> As my discussion of liberalism hopes to show the tradition of secularism that grew from within Hobbes’s controversial proposal for rearranging the relationship between religion and politics is, in fact, in intimate dialogue with the issues motivating civil religion theorizing.

More specifically, I argue that Hobbes’s political-theological proposal that the state should reconstitute religion and religious sensibilities to render them compatible with secular sovereignty – which was, as pointed out above, appropriated by the civil religion tradition – anticipated what would become the dominant model of secular governance advanced by modern liberalism. The secular state’s attitude toward religion in liberal societies is much more accurately captured by Hobbes’s proposal than the theories of toleration developed by seminal figures like Locke. That is, while prevalent justifications of secularism as the separation of religion and politics and state neutrality towards religion may be indebted to the more normatively inclined accounts of toleration, the practical operations of the modern liberal state are more realistically depicted in Hobbes’s account – a conclusion my analysis of Turkish secularization aims to support. In other words, while according to liberalism the state is supposed to stay away from religion, in reality, the secular state operates often precisely as Hobbes suggested it should: by legally and institutionally interfering into the religious realm in order to

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 418.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 5. Beiner surprisingly claims that these questions about the political empowerment of religion became relevant thanks to radical Islam.

regulate religion's political influence and authorize the kinds of religious sensibilities that would help strengthen the secular state's control over life and death. As does Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the modern state thus assumes theological roles by deciding what true religion is and how it should be lived. In that sense, as I hope will become clear in the course of the dissertation, we should be wary of not only the proposed strict dichotomies between the tradition of civil religion and liberalism, but also between secularism and "the dimension of theorizing expressed in the civil religion tradition."

## V.

Irrespective of the particular political-theological strategies sought by modern states to enhance citizenship, at the end, it must be acknowledged that any form of empowerment of theological imaginary necessarily involves the risk of generating conflicting authorities. Even when careful policies and checks are implanted to prevent this risk from materializing, there is always room left for a basis of resistance that could undermine the authority of the state. That this is the case even under most rigorously regulated socio-political conditions where the sovereign imposes strict control over religion and religious practices is powerfully illustrated by an emergent Islamist conscientious objection movement that has come to challenge Turkey's authorization of a particular theological imaginary in its military. In the final chapter of the dissertation, I turn to the examination of this challenge through an ethnographic analysis of Islamist conscientious objection in Turkey – an act of civil disobedience that is not acknowledged and severely prosecuted.

Despite the significant difficulties awaiting the Conscientious Objectors (COs) – ranging from imprisonment to the loss of basic liberal rights such as the right to enter into contracts and vote – Turkey has had a marginal but continuing secular conscientious objection struggle since the early 1990s. But it was only in 2007 that an Islamist conscientious objection emerged within the broader movement. Islamist COs oppose the state’s systematic cultivation of a religious valuation of military service on the basis of nationalist and militaristic interpretations of jihad and martyrdom. According to the COs, the official religious discourses that ground and perpetuate this valuation are not only Islamically unfounded, but also thoroughly illegitimate because of their instrumentalization of Islam to advance political interests. Their critique puts forward a rival religious imaginary that emphasizes the transnationality of Islamic faith and the superiority of the demands of the religious sovereign. Thus, through their resistance, Islamist COs dismantle the particular elements and the very logic of the Hobbesian and Rousseauian solutions that the Turkish republic adopted to legitimize universal conscription and an obligation to die for the state.

Islamist COs’ critique raises several important questions concerning the specific character of Turkish secularism and democracy. But, for the broader theoretical purposes of the dissertation, the most significant consequences of this resistance include, first, its demonstration of the rich dynamism of religious traditions and theological imaginaries, which resist authoritarian mastery. That is, despite the modern state’s aspiration to determine the exact shape religious dimensions of political life should take, such a control over religious meaning is not a realizable goal. As the examination of the Turkish context will show, Islamist COs’ competing interpretations of the theological concepts

appropriated by the official discourses, in particular jihad and martyrdom, empower these theological idioms with the force to inspire resistance to the state rather than military discipline and sacrifice. This suggests that while the modern state is apparently required to appropriate religion and make theological appeals to generate obedience and patriotic dispositions, such appropriations remain perilous. There is always the possibility that these empowered theological appeals might be turned into sources of resistance and rivalry against the secular sovereign, thus demonstrating the tension ridden character of turning religion into an instrument of politics.

Building upon this point – and perhaps more importantly – the Islamist COs’ critique shows that political theology understood as the empowerment of religion to assist political goals and strengthen citizenship may also be unable to resolve the paradox of sacrifice. As I hope to show, Islamist COs’ resistance dismantles the sacrificial logic of the politico-theological argument emphasized by scholars like Paul Kahn. Their competing re-significations of jihad and martyrdom transform the meanings associated with these theological concepts in the nationalist discourses cultivated by the state. At the end of the COs’ critical re-significations, military service and sacrifice appear as sacrilegious and tragic transgressions of Islamic faith rather than pious and heroic enactments of it as emphasized in official discourses. Illustrating the possibility of such critical interventions into the sacrificial normativity of political theology, Turkey’s Islamist Conscientious Objection movement hereby shows that the sacrificial paradox inflicting modern politics appears to survive the interventions of political theology, perhaps not uninjured but certainly alive – hence the relevance of Turkey’s Islamist COs’ critique and resistance for broader questions of political theory.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Sacrifice in Hobbes's Leviathan: The Obligation to Die for the State**

Danille S. Allen has observed that social contract theorists of the Enlightenment era have all invoked the same Old Testament story in grounding their account of consent and political obligation.<sup>1</sup> And it is a story of sacrifice: that of Jephthah and his daughter. Jephthah is an outcast from the Israelite tribe, who eventually grew into a great warrior in exile. When Israel faces a formidable enemy, Jephthah is invited back into the community and asked to fight for it. Accepting the offer, he earns a magnificent victory for Israel. The problem is that in the midst of the battle, unsure how things would fare, Jephthah makes a vow to God that if victorious he would sacrifice the first thing he lays eyes on as he returns Israel. Tragically, it is Jephthah's daughter who comes to greet him on his victorious return. Torn about what to do, Jephthah is saved from this impossible decision by his daughter, who urges him to honor his promise to God. On one condition, however: that she will have two months on the hills to mourn her virgin death before she allows herself to be sacrificed.

Jephthah's military heroism enables him to regain his citizenship. But "he cements a system of promise and consent through his daughter's self-sacrifice."<sup>2</sup> Precisely because she –who remains unnamed in the text – understands the necessity of sacrifice and accepts it, there will be a political future for Jephthah. In Allen's reading, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship Since Brown v. Board of Education* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004): 37. The following two paragraphs draw upon Allen's description.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 37.



particularly in Thomas Hobbes's social contract that sacrifice emerges as the principle political relationship between the citizens and the sovereign.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, sacrifice is not merely an originary act that inaugurates the political society in Hobbes's account; it is a continuing entailment of membership. From the beginning of their agreeing to create the Leviathan, individuals are expected to sacrifice things that are dear to them, be it their natural rights and freedoms, their opinions about how to protect themselves, their private ethical judgments, their right to interpret the Scripture and to deviate from public opinion and religious confession, etc. But, the most dramatic moment of sacrifice is that of life itself. Appropriately, Hobbes invokes the story of Jephthah and his daughter with respect to such a moment, namely, the justified killing of an innocent:

And therefore it may (and doth often) happen in commonwealths that a subject may be put to death by the command of the sovereign power, and yet neither do the other wrong, as when Jephthah caused his daughter to be sacrificed (in which, and the like cases, he that so dieth had liberty to do the action for which he is nevertheless without injury put to death).<sup>4</sup>

For Hobbes, the consent-based politics enabled by the contract involves serious risks, all of which are justified by the voluntarism that grounds membership.

How paradoxical is it then that the Hobbesian social contract— and the liberal political tradition it helped inaugurate — is often criticized for its inability to account for sacrifice? The dilemma results from a constitutive tension that lies at the heart of this new politics. While sacrifice, loss, and indeterminacy are central to the operations of the

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<sup>3</sup> Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 38. In Allen's read, while Jephthah's military sacrifice is the model to make sense of more dramatic losses in political life, the daughter's sacrifice sheds light on a whole range of anonymous losses.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): Chapter 21: 110. All citations from *Leviathan* will indicate the chapter and the paragraph number.

consent-based political order, the ideological justification presented for politics is the promise of life, stability and security. Hobbes argues that individuals agree to create the sovereign solely because it can provide security, order and protection. Their obligations last as long as the sovereign can deliver these goods and no more. Self-preservation is the primary principle that sustains the contractual relationship despite the fact that subjects' life may be justifiably forfeited by the sovereign. In short, the relationship of the sovereign to the community is characterized by a contradictory duality: the promise of life and protection and the demand for sacrifice.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I explore the paradoxes produced by this duality in Hobbes's work with an eye to mapping out its broader consequences for liberalism. The chapter focuses on the most conspicuous form of sacrifice in political life, namely military sacrifice. The scholarship on Hobbes's discussion of military service and national defense is shaped by two conflicting tendencies. Some scholars dedicate their energy to showing why Hobbes's political thought cannot account for an obligation to die for the commonwealth. Michael Walzer claims, for instance, that it is impossible to derive an obligation to fight for the sovereign from the Hobbesian social contract as long as self-preservation remains its founding premise.<sup>6</sup> Other scholars suggest, however, that there are potential resources within the Hobbesian contract that can justify sacrificial political obligations. Deborah Baumgold and Susanne Sreedhar offer alternative readings of the social contract and suggest that it, in fact, sustains the creation of new categories of subjectivity and new

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Paul Kahn, *Sacred Violence: Torture, Terror, and Sovereignty* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Michael Walzer, "Political Obligation to Die for the State," in *Obligations: Essays on Disobedience, War and Citizenship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

citizenship roles, whereby even the supposedly inalienable right to self-preservation may be forfeited.<sup>7</sup>

While these approaches highlight important tensions within Hobbes's political project, my aim in this chapter is to move beyond this pro/con divide. Instead, I read Hobbes's discussion of national defense in light of his historical reflections on the English Civil War and the actions of those who partook in it. The chapter argues that there is a three-stage development in Hobbes's theorization of national defense, arguably as a result of his confrontation with the military advantages of the Parliamentarians' religious zeal and the political utility of religious manipulation during the war. Each stage entails important modifications in the place of sacrifice in the Hobbesian political imaginary. Hobbes's initial reflections on military service in Chapter Twenty-One of *Leviathan* follow a contractual logic and offer a voluntarist solution to the problem of sacrifice. Hobbes makes a distinction between the obligations of drafted and enlisted/impressed soldiers and suggests that only those who have assumed new roles as soldiers by making an explicit "soldier's contract," and have thereby forfeited their right to flee mortal danger are expected to risk their lives in national defense.<sup>8</sup> However, in subsequent revisions of *Leviathan*, Hobbes is required to modify this voluntarist argument. Around September 1650, he adds a new section to the book entitled "A Review, and a Conclusion."<sup>9</sup> In this section, Hobbes makes the obligation to fight for the sovereign a law of nature, valid for everyone, not merely for soldiers.<sup>10</sup> While this

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<sup>7</sup> Deborah Baoumgold, "Subjects and Soldiers: Hobbes on Military Service," *History of Political Thought*, (1983): 43-65; Susanne Sreedhar, "Defending the Hobbesian Right of Self-Defense," *Political Theory* (2008): 781-802.

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Baumgold coined the phrase "soldier's contract" in "Subjects and Soldiers."

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Richard Tuck, introduction to *Leviathan*, by Thomas Hobbes, ix-x.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Richard Tuck, *Ibid.*, ix-xlv.

modification suggests awareness that something other than self-interest, and most importantly moral and religious commitments, is necessary to account for sacrifice, Hobbes does not carry this argument to its logical conclusions in *Leviathan*. I suggest that this had to do not only with Hobbes's political ambition to ground politics in rationalist and noncontroversial grounds, but also with his distrust of historical and popular forms of Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

Importantly, Hobbes was required to return to the question of national defense and military sacrifice quite late in his life when he penned a historical analysis of the English Civil War, entitled *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*. In this late work, Hobbes offers a further modification to *Leviathan*'s arguments on national defense and obligation, and unreservedly acknowledges the necessity of faith and moral attachments to confront the challenge of sacrifice. This acknowledgement entails a complex and controversial proposal. Hobbes advises the sovereign to cultivate "a love of obedience" amongst citizens not through the invocation of patriotism, virtuous citizenship, or a civic religion idealizing the political myth of the mortal God Leviathan, but through the political deployment of a radically reconstituted version of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Drawing upon his controversial reinterpretation of Christian doctrine in the last two books of *Leviathan*, Hobbes suggests that the sovereign should use the universities and preachers to inculcate docile and domesticated religious sensibilities amongst the populace whereby they come to perceive obedience to the secular sovereign as a form of sacrament. In short, he

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<sup>11</sup> I use the term "historical and popular forms of Christianity" here and afterwards to refer to the inherited historical traditions of Christianity (including the official forms that Hobbes frequently refers to) and popular modifications given to it in the particular historical period that Hobbes wrote (including prophetic and apocalyptic Christianity of the civil war era). I address this point in the second section of the chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 59.

suggests that through a pedagogical reform the centerpiece of which is a new public religion, the sovereign should produce belief and faith in secular sovereignty. Thus, Hobbes's ultimate solution to the paradox of sacrifice requires him to make a sustained appeal to religious sensibilities, not to individual self-interest and reason.

But this proposed solution to the paradox of sacrifice generates new theoretical problems. In particular, it appears that the individualistic tenets of his thinking and his concern with securitizing Christianity renders Hobbes blind to what it is about faith that enables people to deal with sacrifice. The new public religion he proposes suffers from two problems: a) it is too rationalistic and sterile, and would probably lack the power to provoke passionate and imaginative attachments, and b) it reverts the individual back to her immediacy and is therefore unable to cultivate the kinds of public sensibilities that are necessary to generate faith in the broader political community and the historical sovereign. These problems would possibly weaken the reconstructed Christianity's ability to thoroughly capture people's hearts and minds, thus rendering Hobbes's solution to the paradox of sacrifice incomplete. The chapter will conclude with reflections upon the broader consequences of Hobbes's proposed strategy and the argument he made in arriving it for the subsequent development of liberal responses to religion and the theory of secularism.

### **Military service and national defense in *Leviathan*:**

A substantial amount of scholarship on Hobbes's *Leviathan* deals with the problems of political authority and obligation produced by the ambition to found politics

on radically individualistic and rationalist grounds.<sup>13</sup> While John Pocock's urging in 1967 triggered engagement with Hobbes's theological arguments which complicate his identification as a hard-core rationalist, paradoxes attending the account of human nature and obligation in the first two books of *Leviathan* – “Of Man” and “Of Common-Wealth” – continue to bother Hobbes's readers.<sup>14</sup> In this section, my goal is to focus on Hobbes's discussion of national defense, which reveals a particularly troublesome paradox about obligation that haunts Hobbes's political project, namely, military sacrifice. Before addressing this specific problem, however, a short summary of Hobbes's description of the social contract and political obligation is in order.

According to Hobbes, prior to the social contract, individuals exist in a natural condition of perfect equality and freedom. This pre-political state is not a condition of blissful freedom, however. On the contrary, it is a condition of unrestrained license where “every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body.”<sup>15</sup> Human interactions are shaped by the pervasive fear of violent death and a restless desire to preserve life. In the absence of a superior power to restrain them, individuals are justified to perform any action that they think necessary for their defense and preservation. This creates a condition of perpetual warfare “of every one against every one.”<sup>16</sup> In Hobbes's

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13 Cf. Thomas Nagel, “Hobbes's Concept of Obligation,” *The Philosophical Review* 68 (1959): 68-83; Hanna Pitkin, “Obligation and Consent-I,” *The American Political Science Review* 59 (1965): 990-999; “Obligation and Consent-II,” *The American Political Science Review* 60 (1966): 39-52; Carole Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critical Analysis of Liberal Theory* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985).

14 Cf. J. G. A. Pocock, “Time, History, and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes,” in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought* (London: Methuen, 1972), 148-201. Some fine works on Hobbes's theological views and their political significance include A.P. Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); David Johnson, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); James Farr, “‘Atomes of Scripture’: Hobbes and Politics of Biblical Interpretation,” in *Thomas Hobbes and Political Theory*, ed. Mary Dietz (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 172-96; Kinch Hoekstra, “Disarming the Prophets. Thomas Hobbes and Predictive Power,” *Rivista di Storia Della Filosofia* 59 (2004): 97-153.

<sup>15</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14: 64.

<sup>16</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14: 64.

memorable words, life is “solitary, nasty, brutish and short.”<sup>17</sup> Seeking peace and security, individuals eventually agree to make a covenant with each other and transfer their unlimited rights to a supreme power, who can overawe them all and impose order by the threat of punishment. The decision is the social contract that creates the sovereign – “the great Leviathan, or the Mortal God,” – who would thenceforth represent them all and maintain peace and security.<sup>18</sup>

In Hobbes’s account, self-disempowerment is entirely voluntary. It is self-interest that leads individuals to impose on themselves a set of obligations that are necessary for political society to function. But once the sovereign is created, and so long as it can guarantee protection, this theoretically self-assumed obligation is transformed into unconditional obedience.<sup>19</sup> The sovereign assumes absolute power over life and death and rules over both political and religious realms. It becomes the sole judge of what is necessary for the preservation of peace and security in the commonwealth, including the waging of war. Subjects are expected to submit their will and judgment entirely to the sovereign. Given the voluntary basis of the authorization of sovereign power and its theoretically representative character, Hobbes claims that nothing the sovereign may do to the subjects is unjust. No grievance can justify dissent or rebellion. Importantly, however, Hobbes leaves room for a single reservation in this otherwise quite total subjection. Individuals retain their right to self-preservation, which is inalienable and always operative.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 13:9.

<sup>18</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14: 65.

<sup>19</sup> Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 52.

<sup>20</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14: 66.

A covenant not to defend myself from force, by force, is alwayes voyd. For no man can transference, or lay down his Right to save himself from Death, Wounds, and Imprisonment, (the avoyding whereof is the onely End of laying down any Right,) and therefore the promise of not resisting force, in no Covenant transferreth any right; nor is obliging.<sup>21</sup>

Because the primary reason individuals create sovereignty is to prolong life, its forfeiture is apparently theoretically impossible. Indeed, Hobbes argues that if someone “by word, or other signs, seem to despoyle himself of the End [preserving life], for which those signes were intended; he is not to be understood as if he meant it, or that it was his will, but that he was ignorant of how such words and actions were to be interpreted.”<sup>22</sup> Even when an individual *appears* to forfeit her right to self-preservation, in other words, Hobbes asks us to interpret this *as if* she did not mean it.

Quite appropriately, then, the idea of self-preservation is also the centerpiece in *Leviathan*’s Chapter Twenty-One, in which Hobbes discusses the rights of the subjects in a commonwealth. Subjects have the right to disobey sovereign commands only when obedience entails risks to their physical integrity and overall survival. Although the sovereign may justly punish such disobedience even with capital punishment, refusal to obey under these conditions is understandable:

For by allowing him [Sovereign Power] to *kill me*, I am not bound to kill my selfe when he commands me. ’Tis one think to say, *Kill me, or my fellow, if you please*;

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<sup>21</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14: 70.

<sup>22</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14: 66.



another thing to say, *I will kill my selfe, or my fellow*. It followeth therefore, that, No man is bound by words themselves, either to kill himselfe, or any other man.<sup>23</sup>

Hobbes lists several conditions where this reservation may be relevant. For instance, although they are lawfully commanded, subjects may refuse to hurt and starve themselves. Likewise, they can refuse to abstain from life-saving medication, refuse to confess to crimes, and to accuse themselves, etc.<sup>24</sup> But most importantly, subjects may refuse to perform military service and desert the battlefield when confronted with the risk of death. This last allowance seems to create significant problems for Hobbes. After all, war poses the uttermost test of legitimacy for the sovereign. According to Hobbes, political obligation depends on the ability of the sovereign to provide protection. The Leviathan should be able to command a strong army in order to deliver this promise. This means that the sovereign has to demand sacrifice. But – given the primacy of self-preservation in the Hobbesian social contract– Hobbes is also required to allow subjects the right to avoid death by avoiding military service. How could this paradox be resolved?

Hobbes has two strategies. The first is largely consistent with the founding assumptions of contractual thinking. Hobbes makes a distinction between the rights of individuals who are drafted, and those who volunteer to serve. He suggests that drafted soldiers may without injustice avoid military service. There are two ways available to draftees to do so. They may provide a substitute for themselves. Or they may simply run away from the battlefield, overcome by the fear of violent death. Such apolitical motivations that lead to disobedience are dishonorable, but they are not unjust. But the

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<sup>23</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 21: 112. Italics in the original.

<sup>24</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 21: 111-2.

situation is altogether different for individuals who volunteer to serve by enlisting or taking impress money. These have explicitly obliged themselves by making a new “soldier’s contract” with the sovereign. The terms of the soldier’s contract add additional obligations to subjects’ normal duties toward the sovereign. Soldiers are obliged to obey the sovereign under all circumstances:

...If a man, besides the obligation of a Subject, hath taken upon him a new obligation of a Souldier, then he hath not the liberty to submit to a new Power, as long as one keeps the field, and given him means of subsistence..<sup>25</sup>

Put differently, through the soldier’s contract, subjects forfeit their otherwise inalienable right to flee mortal danger in order to preserve themselves. They are “obliged not onely to go the battell, but also not to run from it.”<sup>26</sup>

The theoretical device of the soldier’s contract suggests a modification to Hobbes’s initial argument concerning the inalienability of the right to self-preservation. Through it, the possibility of contracts whereby even this right may be forfeited is acknowledged.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it enables Hobbes to accomplish two other goals. First is the positing of a voluntary basis for the recruitment of soldiers. Risking death in defense of the commonwealth hereby becomes a matter of voluntary choice – a self-imposed obligation undertaken by the soldier in exchange for certain benefits. The second is the disavowal of the sacrificial character of enlisted/impressed soldier’s potential death. Because contracts are theoretically premised upon self-interest, the possibility of framing

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<sup>25</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, “A Review, and Conclusion.” 391.

<sup>26</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 21: 112.

<sup>27</sup> In fact, as Richard Tuck notes, Hobbes acknowledges this possibility in other contexts as well. He was aware that people may sacrifice themselves for their loved ones or for their religion. Hobbes was clearest about this in *De Cive*, “where he observed (VI.13) that no man can be obliged by the sovereign; sincere there are others who will do it, if ordered to do so, an a son may prefer to die rather than live in infamy and loathing,” and where he urged Christians oppressed by their prince to ‘go to Christ by Martyrdom; (XVIII, 13). Tuck, introduction to *Leviathan*, by Thomas Hobbes, xxiv.

the contracted soldier's relationship to the sovereign collective through altruistic and disinterested motivations is compromised. The contracted soldier's death becomes not really self-sacrifice, but an unlucky consequence of a self-imposed obligation.

However, the voluntarist solution the soldier's contract enables also has important weaknesses. To begin, Hobbes's discussion is silent about the motivational basis of the enlisted/impressed soldier's self-assumed obligation. What motivates subjects to partake in the soldier's contract and continue to abide by it in the face of mortal danger is not clear. Hobbes suggests that soldiers take money for the services they provide, but he does not explain how monetary interest may motivate subjects to risk their lives. Moreover, the account of passions in *Leviathan* complicates the contractual justification for soldiering. Throughout *Leviathan*, Hobbes claims that the fear of violent death is an overpowering and a universal passion: "The Passion to be reckoned upon, is Fear."<sup>28</sup> Given that contracts impose formal obligations and do not necessarily transform human motivations or character, the soldier's contract need not eliminate the pervasive fear of violent death. Unless the soldier's contract can miraculously accomplish such transformation, it cannot guarantee that fear of death would not take the upper hand in the heat of the battle. In short, lacking an engagement with the psychological and normative grounding of the soldier's contract, Hobbes's argument is not convincing.

Perhaps more importantly, Hobbes's exemption of drafted soldiers from the obligation to risk death in defense of the sovereign (as opposed to the enlisted and impressed soldiers) raises the question of what happens in a total war when the sovereign would have to introduce a general draft. The solution that the soldier's contract provides through distinguishing the obligations of enlisted/impressed and drafted soldiers becomes

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<sup>28</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14: 71.

untenable in a general draft. What if all or most drafted soldiers desert the army in order to preserve their lives as they theoretically have the right to? Hobbes's claim that obligation is dependent upon protection entails the further risk that drafted subjects may change sides during the battle, and obligate themselves to the winning side rather than die in defense of a sovereign that has become unable to protect them. To prevent such theoretical outcomes, Hobbes is required to make a rather exceptional claim. He suggests that when national defense necessitates, the right to self-preservation becomes inoperative even for drafted soldiers. All are obligated to fight and thus risk death in defense of the sovereign:

..when the Defense of the Commonwealth, requireth at once the help of all that are able to bear Arms, everyone is obliged; because otherwise the Institution of the Common-wealth, which they have not the purpose, or courage to preserve, was in vain.<sup>29</sup>

This universal obligation is now said to be theoretically entailed in the considerations of security that undergird subjects' original consent to the social contract:

...an Obligation a man may sometimes have, upon the Command of the Sovereign to execute any dangerous, or dishonorable Office, dependeth not on the Words of our Submission; but on the Intention; which is understood by the End thereof. When therefore our refusall to obey, frustrates the End for which the Sovereignty was ordained; then there is no Liberty to refuse: otherwise there is.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 21:112.

<sup>30</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 21: 112. Italics in the original.

This suggests that although the immediate goal individuals covet as they partake in the social contract may be their individual self-preservation, the contract, in effect, requires them to forfeit this goal when the sovereign itself faces mortal danger. It seems, in other words, that an inversion occurs when the political society is created whereby its security becomes prior to the security of its individual members. Thus, at perilous moments in the life of a commonwealth such as war, the Hobbesian social contract is stripped of its individualist ideological cover and the sovereign demand for sacrifice emerges in its stark clarity.

If Hobbes were to conclude his discussion on national defense at this point, his case for an obligation to fight for the sovereign would be unconvincing. As we have seen, neither the theoretical device of the soldier's contract nor the marshaling of supposed intentions underlying consent could posit a theoretically consistent argument for a universal obligation to fight for the commonwealth. However, Hobbes seems aware of the weaknesses of these attempts. Unable to overcome the paradox of sacrifice on this basis, he is required to make a significant revision to his arguments on national defense. Adding an important section to *Leviathan* entitled "A Review, and Conclusion," he offers another, and I think a more promising, strategy to confront the problem of sacrifice. As Richard Tuck notes, the historical circumstances in which Hobbes wrote this concluding section are important.<sup>31</sup> Hobbes penned this last section in the political climate following Cromwell's defeat of the royalist forces at Dunbar in September 1650. Although there was still an army in Scotland, which was opposed to the actions of the republicans in England and could mount resistance, at this particular time the war seemed finally over.

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<sup>31</sup>Richard Tuck, introduction to *Leviathan*, by Thomas Hobbes, xi-xii. I follow Tuck's readings in making the argument of this paragraph.

This suggests that Hobbes's revisions and conclusion were partly prompted by the need to strengthen his theory of obligation so that rebellion could never again be a possibility. Under these circumstances, he makes a new claim and elevates the obligation to submit to the sovereign and at times of risk defend it until the end to the status of a law of nature:

To the Laws of Nature, declared in the 15. Chapter, I would have this added, *That every man is bound by Nature, as much as in him lieth, to protect in Warre, the Authority, by which he is himself protected in time of Peace.* For he that pretendeth a Right of Nature to preserve his own body, cannot pretend a Right of Nature to destroy him, by whose strength he is preserved.<sup>32</sup>

Making the obligation to defend the commonwealth a law of nature strengthens Hobbes's arguments. According to Hobbes, laws of nature are practical precepts that are conducive to the preservation of life and order. They are "general rules found out by Reason, by which a man is forbidden to do, that which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same."<sup>33</sup> This suggests that in national defense, one theoretically defends one's own conditions of existence and safety. In this sense, the invocation of the laws of nature enables Hobbes to strongly associate individual survival with the maintenance of political society. Fighting for the commonwealth is thus rendered a prudent and a reasonable thing to do.

However, while this argument may support the practical and rational basis of soldiering, it does not really solve the problem about obligation. According to Hobbes's own description of the laws of nature, their obligatory power is "*in foro interno*," in one's conscience only: "They bind to a desire they should take place: but *in foro externo*; that is,

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<sup>32</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, A Review, and Conclusion: 390. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>33</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14: 64.

to the putting them in act, not alwayes.”<sup>34</sup> Rather than real laws, they operate mostly as “theorems:”

..for they are Conclusions, or Theorems concerning what conduceth to the conversation and defense of themselves [men], whereas Law, properly is the word of him that by right hath command over others.<sup>35</sup>

Unless backed by authority, laws of nature produce weak obligations. They give practical guidance and may be persuasive, but they lack the power to shape external behavior. Importantly, however, Hobbes suggests that there is a way that laws of nature may be rendered externally binding. If they are “delivered in the word of God, that by right commandeth all things; then are they properly called Lawes.”<sup>36</sup> Theoretically, then, if the sovereign could convince subjects that it is God’s command to fight in national defense, the problem of sacrifice may be overcome. But Hobbes is reluctant to pursue this possibility raised by his own theorization of natural laws in the discussion of national defense in *Leviathan*. While this potential solution to the problem of sacrifice is implied, it is not explored.

Given the political ambition of Hobbes’s broader political project and the historical circumstances of his writing, this reluctance is understandable. Writing during the English Civil War, Hobbes conceives religion as a politically disruptive force that threatens the authority of the civil sovereign, not as a potential political ally. In fact, an important goal of his political project is to render theological convictions irrelevant to political life. Yet, I want to suggest that Hobbes’s invocation of natural laws when he

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<sup>34</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 15: 79.

<sup>35</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 15: 80.

<sup>36</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 15: 80.

finds himself unable to justify sacrificial obligations through the social contract reveals an awareness of the necessity to invoke something other than self-interest in order to manage the sovereign demand for sacrifice. By invoking natural laws in this context, Hobbes implicitly acknowledges the role moral and religious convictions may play in provoking strong obligations and garnering obedience. At the end, *Leviathan* fails to offer a convincing argument for the obligation to fight for the sovereign, but leaves the reader with the suggestion that moral and religious convictions may have a role to play in political life. As we shall see, Hobbes returns to this problem in a later work, *Behemoth*, which offers a more nuanced engagement with human nature and the role of faith in politics.

### **Faith and sacrifice in *Behemoth*:**

From the Reformation through to the Civil War, there was an explosive revival of prophetic and apocalyptic religious traditions in England. During the revolutionary decades, but especially after 1641, when official censorship came to an end, apocalyptic radicalism pervaded popular consciousness.<sup>37</sup> Freedom of press enabled a rapid reproduction and circulation of radical pamphlets, speeches and sermons amongst the literate. Kinch Hoekstra has shown that in this social atmosphere of radicalism, people were disposed to welcome any type of apocalyptic prophecy, regardless of the foundation

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<sup>37</sup> Kinch Hoekstra shows that prophesy did not suddenly spring up in 1641. The defeat of the Spanish armada in 1588, the year Hobbes was born, was crucial for fusing apocalyptic excitement with patriotic fervor. Quoting Bernard Capp, Hoekstra wrote, "What emerged was a belief in England's unique role as God's elect nation, with Spain portrayed as the epitome of evil." With the outbreak of the civil war, both the diffusion of prophecy and its targets changed, however. While in Hobbes's youth, prophesies promoted "what were understood to be the aims and unity of England, prophesy of all kinds after 1640 was markedly factional." Hoekstra, "Disarming the Prophets," 99-100.



upon which it was purported to rest.<sup>38</sup> Accusations of antichristianity abounded and “could be leveled against anything one disliked.”<sup>39</sup> From 1642 onwards, the political influence of radical preachers increased. The Parliament started to hold regular fast sermons on the last Wednesday of every month.<sup>40</sup> “It was an observation of that time,” Clarendon wrote, “that the first publishing of extraordinary news was from the pulpit; and by the preacher’s text, and his manner of discourse upon it, the auditors might judge, and commonly foresaw, what was like to be next done in the Parliament or Council of State.”<sup>41</sup> A crucial development, in this context, was the transformation in the targets of “the Antichrist.” While previously reserved for figures considered to be the enemies of England, most importantly, “the Pope” and “the Turk,” during the course of the civil war this dangerous accusation came to be directed against the King himself.<sup>42</sup> The attendant framing of the struggle between the King and the Parliamentarians as a divinely sanctioned struggle against the Antichrist had important consequences. The Christian call to put-down the Antichrist was thereby transformed into a revolutionary responsibility.<sup>43</sup>

Hobbes decided to provide an account of this theologically driven political convulsion that struck England between 1640 and 1660 quite late in his life.<sup>44</sup> He

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<sup>38</sup> Hoekstra, “Disarming the Prophets,” 99.

<sup>39</sup> Hoekstra, “Disarming the Prophets,” 107.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Edward, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion*, ed. W. D. Macray (Oxford, 1888), IV, 194. Between 1642 and 1649, the Parliament held regular fast sermons, which were preached before Parliament on the last Wednesday of every month. Cf. Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*.

<sup>42</sup> Hoekstra, “Disarming the Prophets,” 106. Hoekstra notes, however, that it was difficult to contain accusations of antichristianity. As political weapons, such accusations were dangerous and could easily be turned against the party that initially invoked them.

<sup>43</sup> Hoekstra, “Disarming the Prophets,” 103. See also Christopher Hill *God’s Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1970).

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Holmes, “Introduction, vii-viii.

completed the manuscript of *Behemoth* in 1668, when he was almost eighty years old.<sup>45</sup> But this opportunity to historically apply the analytical framework he developed in earlier works – particularly, in *De Cive* (1642) and *Leviathan* (1651) – for discussing sedition, rebellion, and political breakdown entailed a significant challenge. The historical reality Hobbes had to narrate did not sit well with the founding assumptions of his political project. During the civil war, people did not behave the way Hobbes described in his social contract theory. Rather than rational and self-seeking egoists, who were principally motivated by the fear of violent death, the civil war period showed that people were, “first of all, incapable of calculative reasoning and, second, stupidly indifferent to self-preservation.”<sup>46</sup> This has important consequences for Hobbes’s theory of political obligation. If people fear for their life less than they fear invisible things and eternal damnation, the project to ground obedience on protection and the threat of punishment would become untenable. Put differently, the historical reality Hobbes wanted to explain undermined his broader political design for a commonwealth based upon the fear of corporal punishment, especially the threat of death.<sup>47</sup>

Confronting this paradox required Hobbes to make claims that significantly complicated the theoretical arguments he put forward in *Leviathan*. To begin, he modified the claim that fear of death is the central human motivation that the sovereign could rely upon. Both the object and role of fear changes with the transition from

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<sup>45</sup> Named after the biblical creature of chaos and destruction, *Behemoth* is a cautionary tale of the breakdown of political authority and challenges entailed in reestablishing it. Written in the form a dialogue between a master, *A*, and his pupil, *B*, it consists of four parts, exploring in orderly fashion the ideological origins of the English civil war, strategies of the actors involved, detailed chronicle of events and their broader ideological implications. The book was not published until 1682. Holmes notes that a possible explanation for this delay is Charles II’s reluctance to publish this clearly royalist, but “outspokenly anticlerical” work.

<sup>46</sup> Holmes, “Introduction,” xlix.

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, *The Rhetoric of Leviathan*, 101.

*Leviathan to Behemoth*.<sup>48</sup> In *Leviathan*'s Chapter Thirteen, Hobbes claims that in natural conditions the greatest object of fear is violent death by the hand of others. In chapter Fourteen, he notes two further objects of fear: fear of invisible spirits and fear of punishment. While distinctive to civil society, the latter fear is said to be usually stronger:<sup>49</sup>

[Fear has] two very generall Objects: one The Power of Spirits Invisible; the other, The Power of those men they shall therein Offend. Of these two, though the former be the greater Power, yet the fear of the later is commonly the greater Feare. The Feare of the former is in every man, his own Religion: which hath place in the nature of man before Civill Society. The later hath not so; at least not place enough, to keep men to their promises.<sup>50</sup>

In *Behemoth*, this order is completely reversed. The fear of imaginary things and eternal damnation is noted to be by far the overpowering fear during the civil war.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, in contrast to the fear of death, fear of damnation is treated as a most significant military asset – at least, for the Parliament: “As much as eternal torture is more terrible than death, so much they would fear the clergy more than the king.”<sup>52</sup> Hobbes acknowledges that faith makes better soldiers. With respect to the success of Cromwell's army, he credits

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Gabriella Slomp, “On Ambition, Greed, and Fear,” in *Hobbes's Behemoth, Religion and Democracy*, ed. Tomaz Mastnak (Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 2009), 129-48.

<sup>49</sup> Slomp, “On Ambition,” 141.

<sup>50</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 14: 71.

<sup>51</sup> Slomp, “On Ambition,” 141.

<sup>52</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 14-5. Moreover, even the fear of “invisible spirits” is no longer seen as universal. When *B* suggests that nothing would motivate soldiers who fear eternal suffering and thus refuse to take arms in defense of their sovereign, *A* responds cynically: “there are but few whose consciences are so tender as to refuse money when they want it.” Depending on circumstances and individual character, other passions – such as greed – may overpower even the usually strongest religious fear. *Behemoth*, 118.

primarily the religious zeal of the radicals.<sup>53</sup> “Cromwell’s best cards, whereof he had a very great number in the army, and some in the House, whereof he himself thought one,” were “the fanatics.”<sup>54</sup> Believing God to be on their side and fearing only failing him, they fought as if nothing else mattered.

This challenged not only the attempt to base obligation on the principle of self-preservation, but also Hobbes’s tendency to promote sheer force as the primary source of power. Though it would be wrong to claim there is no place for opinion and belief in Hobbes’s other works, his appreciation of the significance of belief and affect in securing authority is nowhere as explicit as it is in *Behemoth*. Public opinion seems to be all that mattered during the civil war. The Parliamentarians earned power through appeals to people’s passions and religious imaginations: “the power of the mighty hath no foundation but in the opinion and belief of the people.”<sup>55</sup> This suggests that, the sovereign should not only rely on force:

For if men know not their duty, what is there that can force them to obey the laws? An army, you will say. But what shall force the army?<sup>56</sup>

If the sovereign only had the police and the army to impose its authority, “how could it attain authority over its own authority-enforcing machine?”<sup>57</sup> The King’s inability to control his forces and the Parliamentarians’ success in mobilizing the army proved the

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<sup>53</sup> Some other passions Hobbes lists as supportive of soldiering include hatred, spite, malice, and ambition. For example, with respect to the King’s soldiers, he writes that although they were “as stout as the Parliament’s army, yet because their valor was not sharpened so with malice as theirs were of the other side, they fought not so keenly as their enemies did.” Hobbes, *Behemoth*: 114.

<sup>54</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*: 136. Fanatics were “Brownists, Anabaptists, Independents, Fifth-monarchy-men, Quakers, and diverse others all commonly called by the name of fanatics,” who were under the influence of preachers and men that “outdid the Reformation” with “their strange and many pernicious doctrines.” *Behemoth*: 136.

<sup>55</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Holmes, “Introduction,” xxxix.

all-importance of affective relationships in the control over the military. To be most secure, the sovereign needed an army who believed in his power and would not turn against him. Because people put themselves in harm's way only to defend what they believe in and cherish, Hobbes suggests that the sovereign should cultivate "a love of obedience."<sup>58</sup>

This remarkable acknowledgement of the necessity to supplement force with faith and affective attachments – especially in the military – seems to offer a corrective to *Leviathan*'s unsuccessful attempt to account for military sacrifice. As we have seen in the previous section, Hobbes was eventually required to invoke the laws of nature to justify the obligatory character of national defense. While this suggests an implicit acknowledgement of the necessity of moral convictions in convincing people to kill and die for the state, Hobbes did not carry this claim to its logical conclusion in *Leviathan*. Was Hobbes making explicit in *Behemoth* what was implicit in *Leviathan* by affirming the necessity of belief and affect in garnering obedience? Put another way, did Hobbes suggest in this late work that the sovereign should rely upon faith and religious manipulation to garner authority over his army and subjects?

I would like to suggest that Hobbes makes a more complicated argument, which involves two stages, the first involving an attack on historical and popular Christianity, and the second a proposal to re-constitute it. In the first stage, Hobbes offers an elaborate account of the risks involved in invoking faith and religious doctrines in the army and politics. He unleashes bitter attacks at Christianity, the religious culture of his times, and the political actors who relied upon religious passions and imaginaries during the war.

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<sup>58</sup> "I am therefore of your opinion that men may be brought to a love of obedience by preachers and gentlemen that imbibe good principles in their youth at the Universities." Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 59.

The “dangerous doctrines” radical preachers and prophets drew upon to incite people to rebellion, including the lawfulness of disobeying the sovereign when his commands contradict God’s law are vehemently attacked.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Hobbes criticizes the widespread ignorance and fanaticism in England, and attempts to discredit prophetic and apocalyptic claims and ideas as imposture.<sup>60</sup> Hobbes position is that prophecy has historically come to an end and the end of the world is not yet to come.<sup>61</sup> Radical preachers, who pretend to have special relationship with divinity, and the false prophets are “crafty and ambitious men” who use “simple people” as pawns in their game of power.<sup>62</sup> While some like Lily, one of the most influential prophets during the civil war, are after financial gain. – “a mere cozeners,” who wants “to get maintenance from a multitude of ignorant people” – others like the radical Puritan preachers seek civil power.<sup>63</sup> Relying upon oratory and rhetoric, they hide their “ambitious plot to raise sedition against the state” like “no other tragedian in the world” could. It is through such manipulation of illogical beliefs and religious imaginaries that obedience due to the Crown was transferred towards the clergy.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 71.

<sup>60</sup> Given that it undermined Hobbes’s political project in which the sovereign controls his subjects through the threat of punishment, Hobbes believed that the right course to take for the sovereign was to initiate some kind of religious enlightenment – not to encourage the continuity and further dissemination of irrational fears and beliefs by utilizing them: “If this superstitions fear of Spirits were taken away, and with it, Prognostiques from Dreams, False Prophecies, and many other things depending thereon, by which crafty ambitious persons abuse the simple people, men would be much fitter than they are for civil Obedience.”

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Hoekstra, “Disarming the Prophets.”

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Slomp, “On Ambition.” Slomp notes Hobbes is at pains to show how easily people are deceived, not simply by priests and talented orators, but also “by vulgar ‘fortune tellers,’ ‘astrologers,’ and ‘prophets.’”

<sup>63</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 188.

<sup>64</sup> Holmes, “Introduction,” xii. An important danger Hobbes notes, in this context, is the fact that prophesy has the power to bring about what it predicted because people are naturally anxious about the future: “there is nothing that renders human councils difficult, but the uncertainty of future time; nor that so well directs men in their deliberations, as the foresight of the sequels of their actions; prophesy being many times the principal cause of the event foretold. If upon some predictions, the people should have been made confident that Oliver Cromwell and his Army should be upon a day to come utterly defeated, would not have

Hobbes offers a dramatic historical example to further illustrate the political dangers associated with this kind of religious manipulation. He cites a lengthy anecdote by Diodotus Siculus about the predictive powers wielded by priests in ancient Ethiopia. Well trained in astronomy, these priests “were able to parlay their predictions of eclipses and other celestial phenomena into thoroughgoing power not only over the people, but over the kings themselves.”<sup>65</sup> With the urging of the priests, individuals condemned to capital punishment would kill themselves quietly in their houses, while the kings would commit suicide learning that “the Gods have given such order.”<sup>66</sup> Hobbes approves Diodotus’s conclusion on this historical episode: “in former times Kings did obey the priests, not as mastered by force and arms, but as having their reason mastered by superstition.”<sup>67</sup> Hobbes’s advice is the termination of this malicious kind of religious manipulation, which encroaches upon the authority of sovereign, as did the Ethiopian King Ptolemy II, who finally took “heart as befitted a King,” and “went with his soldiers to a place called Abaton, where was the golden temple of the Ethiopians; killed all the priests, abolished the custom, and rectified the kingdom according to his will.”<sup>68</sup>

On the surface, Hobbes’s fierce attack at religion and religious manipulation may seem like an inconsistent move. After all, Hobbes dedicates lengthy parts of *Behemoth* to the description of the military and political efficacy of religious zeal. While the obvious historical reason for this is that religion and religious passions were most successfully mobilized against the King during the war, Hobbes’s royalist agenda cannot be a

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everyone endeavour’d to assist, and to deserve well of the party that should give him defeat? Upon this account it was that Fortune-tellers and Astrologers were so often banished out of Rome.” *Behemoth*, 188.

<sup>65</sup> Hoekstra, “Disarming the Prophets,” 121.

<sup>66</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 94

<sup>67</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 94.

<sup>68</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 94.

theoretical explanation for this position. This theoretical stance against religion has to do rather with Hobbes's broader political project and the theological commitments it entailed. As religious conflicts came to dominate the political life of England beginning with the 1640s, Hobbes began to conceive religion, and in particular, post-Reformation Christianity as a security threat for the kind of political order he envisioned. As a book-based religion, which allowed free sermonizing, Christianity encouraged anarchy and disobedience. Hobbes argues that "only in Christendom," individuals were given "the liberty to call the people together, and make orations to them frequently, or at all, without making the state acquainted."<sup>69</sup> Moreover, he singles out religious civil war as Christianity's chief contribution to political development.<sup>70</sup> "That there is no such thing [freedom to preach] permitted in all the world out of Christendom, nor therefore any civil wars about religion."<sup>71</sup>

In addition to religious liberty, there are doctrines in the Scripture suggesting that it is "lawful for subjects to resist the King, when he commands anything that is against the Scripture, that is, contrary to the command of God."<sup>72</sup> Hobbes thinks that the most frequent "praetext of Sedition, and Civill Warre, in Christian Common-wealths hath a long time proceeded" from this unresolved difficulty "of obeying at once, both God, and Man, when their Commandments are one contrary to the other."<sup>73</sup> Christianity rivals the sovereign in making claims on the people. This compromises Hobbes's political project to centralize sovereign power. Moreover, by licensing individual conscience with the right to judge the sovereign's laws and actions, Christianity provides a permanent

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<sup>69</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 16

<sup>70</sup> Holmes, "Introduction," xxxiv.

<sup>71</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 63-4.

<sup>72</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 50.

<sup>73</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 42: 321.



breeding ground for theological conflicts, disagreements, and hence civil war. Thus if these dangerous doctrines are not purged from Christianity, it is “impossible that the life of any King, or the peace of any Christian Kingdom, can be long secure.”<sup>74</sup>

It is important to remember in this context that Hobbes has already devoted a large but relatively neglected part of *Leviathan* precisely to rendering Christian doctrine safe for the sovereign.<sup>75</sup> In *Behemoth*, he heavily draws upon the theological views laid out in the last two books of *Leviathan*, “Of a Christian Commonwealth,” and “Of the Kindome of Darknesse.” In these books, Hobbes offers a radical plan to solve the security problem Christianity poses to secular political order. Two interrelated claims shape his arguments: the unification of religious and political authority at the hands of the sovereign and, more alarmingly, the making of the sovereign the sole judge and interpreter of the Scripture. Hobbes argues that “the Right of Judging what doctrines are fit for Peace, and to be taught the Subjects, is in all Common-wealths inseparably annexed to the Soveraing Power Civill.”<sup>76</sup> The monarch is to impose the doctrines and practices he thinks are fit for peace as “Publique Worship,” so that the commonwealth could honor God as totality with a uniform will.<sup>77</sup> By making the sovereign the sole legitimate interpreter of the Scripture and advising religious uniformity, Hobbes aims to suppress theological disagreements stemming from conflicting interpretations of the Scripture. In addition to asserting the supremacy of the civil sovereign over ecclesiastical

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<sup>74</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Since Pocock’s urging in 1967, however, this neglect has begun to be rectified, and the significance of Hobbes’s theological arguments for his political project is more widely noted. For citations see the introduction to the chapter.

<sup>76</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 42: 295.

<sup>77</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 31.

as well as private authority, this argument renders religious interpretation not a matter of truth, but of legality:

Because men do, for the most part, rather draw the Scripture to their own sense, than follow the true sense of the Scripture, there is no other way to know, certainly, and in all cases, what God commands, or forbids us to do, but by the sentence of him or them that are constituted by the King to determine the sense of the Scripture<sup>78</sup>

Making the King “the chief judge of the rectitude of all interpretations of the Scripture,” also implies that there is no contradiction between obeying civil laws and the Scripture: “to obey the King’s laws and public edicts, is not to disobey, but to obey God.”<sup>79</sup>

Finally, Hobbes offers a new account of life and death. As Tuck notes, he devotes “prolonged exegetical labors to establishing the materiality of the soul, the terrestrial character of an afterlife, and the fact that there will be no eternal torments for the damned.”<sup>80</sup> Hobbes significantly minimizes the necessary criteria for admission into heaven. He claims that faith in the fact that Christ represents God and obedience to the laws of nature are sufficient for salvation. The only thing that condemns one to eternal torment is the breach of faith – denying that Christ represents God – and disobedience.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Hobbes suggests that Hell does not exist. Eternal suffering consists simply of “a second death, which was to follow bodily resurrection of all men and their sentencing by God at the Day of Judgement.”<sup>82</sup> Through this new eschatology, Hobbes attempts to

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<sup>78</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 52.

<sup>79</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 53.

<sup>80</sup> Tuck, introduction to *Leviathan*, by Thomas Hobbes, xli.

<sup>81</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 38: 245-7.

<sup>82</sup> Tuck, introduction to *Leviathan*, by Thomas Hobbes, xli. As Tuck has suggested, Hobbes may have very well aimed to liberate people from unnecessary religious fears with these arguments.

further delegitimize an important ground for disobedience, the fear of damnation. The liberation of subjects from this disruptive fear would help support the authority of the sovereign, who controls subjects' behavior principally through the threat of secular punishment.

When revisited in light of Hobbes's broader theological arguments, *Behemoth's* initial attack at dangerous doctrines in the Scripture and the widespread ignorance and fanaticisms in England becomes clearer. The anarchic potential of Christianity and popular religious culture pose significant dangers to the secular sovereign. Before Christianity is purged off from these dangerous doctrines and the rebellious religious culture is redeemed, relying upon religious passions is not a safe option. Quite appropriately, then, the second stage of Hobbes's argument involves a constructive plea to domesticate Christianity and Christian religious sensibilities so that they become compatible with the secular political society that Hobbes envisions. The sovereign should not only officially impose the new public religion that Hobbes described in *Leviathan*, but also undertake a thorough pedagogical reform to transform the religious sensibilities of his subjects. For Hobbes, this cultural transformation is perhaps more crucial than the official imposition of a new public religion for he accepts in *Behemoth* that the most secure ground of power is belief rather than fear.<sup>83</sup> The crucial question is how to perform this transformation of beliefs and sensibilities, a transformation thoroughly of political-theological character. Hobbes's distrust of pedagogical institutions is well known. In

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<sup>83</sup> Other scholars have noted the cultural and pedagogical aspects of Hobbes's intention to transform religion. Johnston argued, for example, that Hobbes's real target lies deeper than the institutions and traditions of Christianity, and consists of a state of mind, a set of underlying beliefs about the self and the world that underpins those institutions and makes those traditions possible. Johnston, "The Rhetoric of *Leviathan*," 158. In a similar vein, James Farr commented "Hobbes intended and hoped to reconstitute the language and community of his contemporaries – that is, to teach obedience to English subjects and to enlighten enthusiastic and superstitious Christians in the ways of natural philosophy and reason." James Farr, "'Atoms of Scripture,' 188.

*Behemoth*, he directs some of his sharpest criticisms to the universities. Universities were at “the core of the rebellion” during the civil war.”<sup>84</sup> It was from the universities that “Presbyterians carted their theology into the churches,” and gentlemen transported their politics into the Parliament.<sup>85</sup> Hobbes claims that it was Archbishop Laud’s colossal mistake to introduce into politics the theological controversies that should have stayed in the academy: “his squabbings in the University about free will, and his standing upon punctilios concerning the service-book.”<sup>86</sup> Lastly, universities had long been the breeding ground of antimonarchical and republican thought, in particular, Greek and Roman history and philosophy.<sup>87</sup> In Hobbes’s view, in other words, universities played a curial role in bringing out the alliance between the Presbyterians and “the democratical men” that led to the civil war.

But, despite their disruptive potential, Hobbes thinks universities should not to be “cast away,” but “better disciplined.”<sup>88</sup> In fact, he assigns a central role to the reformed universities in his pedagogical scheme:

..the Universities here shall bend and direct their studies to the settling of it, that is, to the teaching of absolute obedience to the laws of the King, and to his public edicts under the Great Seal of England.<sup>89</sup>

Universities should teach the kind of politics that would “make men know, that it is their duty to obey all laws whatsoever that shall by the authority of the King be enacted.”<sup>90</sup>

While in his social contract theory, Hobbes attempts to ground obedience primarily on

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<sup>84</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 58.

<sup>85</sup> Holmes, “Introduction,” xxvii.

<sup>86</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 73.

<sup>87</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 23-24.

<sup>88</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 58.

<sup>89</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 56.

<sup>90</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 58.

rational self-interest, in this suggestion for pedagogical reform, the stress is rather on the transformation of religious sensibilities. Universities should “make men understand,” Hobbes writes:

that the civil laws are God’s laws, as they that make them are by God appointed to make them; and to make men know the people and the Church are one thing, and have but one head, the King, and that no man has title to govern under him; that the King owes his crown to God only, and to no man, ecclesiastical or other; and that the religion they teach there, be a quiet waiting for the coming again of our blessed Savior, and in the mean time a resolution to obey the King’s laws (which also are God’s laws), to injure no man, to be in charity with all men, to cherish the poor and sick, and to live soberly and free from scandal; without mingling our religion with points of natural philosophy..<sup>91</sup>

Hobbes’s new religion is assigned the political role of bringing subjects into “a love of obedience.”<sup>92</sup> It is seen as “a necessary part of reconstructing society.”<sup>93</sup>

In sum, then, while Hobbes attempts to delegitimize the military and political influence of one religion – historical and popular Christianity – he suggests making another – the re-constituted Christianity – the political religion of the commonwealth. As the disruptive and anarchical potential of the Scripture is cast aside, a docile and state-

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<sup>91</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 58.

<sup>92</sup> Hobbes, *Behemoth*, 59.

<sup>93</sup> Tuck, introduction to *Leviathan*, by Thomas Hobbes, xliii.

controlled Christianity – a religion of “quiet waiting for the coming again of our blessed Savior” – becomes a crucial political tool for maintaining public order and security.<sup>94</sup>

### **A religion of “quiet waiting”**

What then are the implications of Hobbes’s proposal of a new religion for the paradox of sacrifice produced by the social contract? Could this new Christianity cultivate the political sensibilities that are necessary to manage the demand for sacrifice in political life? At the end, I think this is unlikely. There are two reasons for this. First, Hobbes’s proposal for transforming religion and religious sensibilities has a single and a negative goal: to suppress the subversive potential of Christianity and to prevent civil war. The primary role of the new religion is to foster what some scholars have called the *katéchonic* function of the Hobbessian state. *Katéchon* is a biblical figure mentioned in St Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians.<sup>95</sup> It is responsible for restraining the Antichrist and keeping apocalyptic chaos in check. While the restrainer has historically been identified with the Catholic Church and imperial powers – in particular the Roman

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<sup>94</sup> It is important to note some of the consequences of Hobbes’s making of religion a tool of political pedagogy at the hands of the sovereign, for his broader political project. To name a few, the suggestion that legal positivism should not be the official doctrine of the Crown, and that the sovereign should claim civil laws to be God’s laws does not sit well with Hobbes’s account of authorization and law-making. Moreover, the principles of representation and voluntarism increasingly fade out of the picture as Hobbes moves towards quite conservative descriptions of political authority. Because conscience and judgment are rendered totally irrelevant to political life, ideas of consent and self-assumed obligation become quite meaningless. I will not be able to engage in detail here these important issues, which others have done elsewhere. Cf. Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Palaver, “Hobbes and the Katéchon: The Secularization of Sacrificial Christianity” *Contagion* (1995): 57-74. Palaver notes that the figure appears in a passage concerned with “man of lawlessness” that precedes the second coming of Christ. The reign of the “man of sin,” or the Antichrist as he is often called in the traditional interpretation of this passage, will not begin, however, in the immediate future, for something (2 Thess. 2:6), or someone (2 Thess. 2:7), is restraining him: “And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed.” The biblical term for the restraining power is *katéchon*: to hold back, to hold fast, to hold in possession, to bind, to restrain. Many myths refer to a power or a person like a *katéchon* which keeps chaos in check.” Palaver, “Hobbes and the Katéchon,” 61.

Empire – in Hobbes’s work the Leviathan becomes a secularized version of the *katéchon*.<sup>96</sup> By transferring a theological concept to the realm of politics, Hobbes thus makes the secular state the restrainer that keeps the destructive potential of religion away from the realm of politics.<sup>97</sup>

Through its eradication of imaginative and enthusiastic dimensions of religion, and stressing obedience, docility and rationalism, Hobbes’s new religion may indeed support Leviathan’s *katéchonic* goal of preventing religious chaos and war. However, one is left wondering how it can assist in the production of affections and sensibilities that are necessary to respond to the state’s own demand for sacrifice. The new religion Hobbes prescribes is concerned primarily with repression. Thus, while eternal damnation, subversive doctrines and excessive religious passions are eliminated, they are not replaced by alternative imaginative and emotive ideals and myths that stem from within the new religion to support the civil sovereign’s claims to authority. Underestimating the need to substitute new forms in place of the imaginative and mythical grounds of Christianity, Hobbes would remain unable to provoke a faithful love and devotion for the civil sovereign through his new religion.

This failure may ultimately be seen as a success for Hobbes’s political project. After all, Hobbes’s aim is to ground political obligation on secular grounds. Although he is required to propose a new religion to foster this goal, he refuses to make this new religion a source of imagination and passion that may rival the political myth of Leviathan. In other words, the alternative myth Hobbes offers in place of historical and

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<sup>96</sup>The Church’s stance against the translation of the Bible, for instance, aimed to serve the *katéchonic* function of containing the subversive and anarchic message of Christ.” Palaver, “Hobbes and the Katéchon, 62.

<sup>97</sup> Palaver, “Hobbes and the Katéchon, 62.

popular Christianity is contained not in the new religion he prescribes, but in the new politics. What is supposed to generate faith is the myth of the mortal God, the Leviathan, who restrains the chaos and violence of the state of nature through his awesome power, not the new religion, which is designed merely to eliminate the passions and ideas that challenge the secular state's power. The problem, however, is that Hobbes's political myth is also powerless when it comes to the issue of sacrifice. Putting too much stress on the preservation of life and the pursuit of self-interest, Hobbesian political myth too lacks the psychological and imaginative resources that enable citizens to deal with loss and sacrifice. Thus, through a circular logic, sacrifice reemerges as an irresolvable problem in Hobbes's political thought. Although he identifies the problem in his political arguments and attempts to resolve it by marshaling a new religion, Hobbes ends up reasserting the paradox.

But there is another, and perhaps a more important reason why Hobbes's proposal for a new religion would be unable to resolve this paradox. It has to do with a fundamental assumption in Hobbes's conception of religion, which informs his design for remaking Christianity as well. Throughout his work, Hobbes distinguishes private faith from public confession. The true measure of faith, Hobbes writes, is inner belief. It "hath no relation to, nor dependence at all upon, Compulsion, or Commandment."<sup>98</sup> Rather, faith is "a gift of God, which Man can neither give, nor take away by promise of rewards, or menaces of torture."<sup>99</sup> Accordingly, although subjects are expected to obey all civil and religious laws promulgated by the sovereign unconditionally, this obedience extends only to their external actions. Their inner thoughts and beliefs remain free: "a private man has

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<sup>98</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 42: 342.

<sup>99</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 42: 342.



always the liberty, (because thought is free,) to believe, or not to believe in his heart.”<sup>100</sup>

This reservation undergirds Hobbes’s distinction between public and private religion:

There is a *Publique*, and a *Private* Worship. Publique, is the Worship that a Common-wealth performeth, as one Person. Private, is that which a Private person exhibiteth..Private is in secret Free; but in the sight of the multitude, it is never without some Restraint.<sup>101</sup>

While nonconformity is not allowed in public worship, Hobbes allows individuals the right to deviate in their hearts.

This public/private distinction shapes Hobbes’s views on the rights of religious minorities as well. Hobbes counsels minorities to follow the example of Naaman the Syrian described in the Old Testament in their relations with the sovereign. According to the story, Naaman obeys his master and bows down in front of false idols. But because he still believes in his heart in the God of Israel, his external behavior does not compromise his faith. Any mistake attending the sovereign’s commands is not his but the sovereign’s guilt:

Profession with the tongue is but an external thing, and no more than any other gesture whereby we signify our obedience; and wherein a Christian, holding firmly in his heart the Faith of Christ, hath the same liberty which the Prophet Elisha allowed Naaman the Syrian.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, minorities have the liberty to dissent in their private worship and in the secrecy of their homes, but they do not have the right to publicly disobey. If they do disobey, however, they must be ready to face the consequences of their action:

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<sup>100</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 38: 238.

<sup>101</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 31:189.

<sup>102</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 42: 271-2.

[They] ought to expect their reward in Heaven, and not complain their Lawfull Sovereign; much less make war upon him. For he that is not glad of any just occasion of Martyrdome, has the faith he professeth, but pretends it onely.<sup>103</sup>

Notoriously, Carl Schmitt found Hobbes's distinction between inner faith and outer confession profoundly distressing. Otherwise an enthusiastic admirer, Schmitt identifies this distinction as the rupture that eventually grew into modern liberalism by dissolving the unity of the political realm.<sup>104</sup> For Schmitt, by allowing the privacy of belief, Hobbes lets subjects' hearts and minds off the sovereign hook. As the sovereign abandons the ambition to assert religious truth and shape private belief, the state turns into "an externally all-powerful, internally powerless concentration of power."<sup>105</sup> It becomes, in other words, "mostly machine." The tendency towards "technicity" and the decline of the political is thereby set into motion.<sup>106</sup>

Schmitt claims that Hobbes introduces the public/private distinction under the influence of the Judeo-Christian Bible that gave rise to modern individualism and equality.<sup>107</sup> He accuses liberal Jews and especially Spinoza and Moses Mendelssohn for discovering this crack in Hobbes's philosophy and using it to destroy the concept of the Leviathan state.<sup>108</sup> As Tracy Strong has noted, despite its manifest anti-Semitism, the story Schmitt tells is ultimately a version of the story of rationalization and disenchantment that Weber put forward.<sup>109</sup> To that extent, it also helps clarify why Hobbes's new religion, on its own, would be insufficient to resolve the paradox of

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<sup>103</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 43: 331.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 2008).

<sup>105</sup> Schmitt, *The Leviathan*, 61.

<sup>106</sup> Tracy B. Strong, "Introduction," xii.

<sup>107</sup> Palaver, "Hobbes and the Katechon," 70.

<sup>108</sup> Schmitt, *The Leviathan*, 83.

<sup>109</sup> Strong, "Introduction," xiii.

sacrifice. Schmitt attacks Hobbes primarily for unwittingly undermining the political myth of the all-powerful state through this inner reservation. He quite correctly observes that as individual and public allegiances diverge, it would be harder for the state to command strong obligations such as the obligation to kill and risk death for the sovereign. But perhaps more importantly, with this allowance, Hobbes endangers a central goal of his proposed religious and cultural reform: transformation of religious and political sensibilities. If individual minds and hearts are ultimately inaccessible to sovereign control, the imposition of a state-centered public religion – no matter how profoundly crafted it may be – would only secure formal obedience, not necessarily inner transformation. Lacking the ability to perform the latter, the ability of Hobbes's new religion to engender genuine beliefs and convictions in support of the secular sovereign and thereby sustain a total political transformation would be weakened.

Ironically then, while it aims to overcome the challenges individual conscience and interpretation pose to the civil sovereign, Hobbes's proposal to render religion safe for the sovereign results in the creation of a most secure venue – the private sphere – where individuality could further flourish in isolation from the community and laws. It is this individualistic core of his thinking that prevents both his political and religious project from offering a resolution to the paradox of sacrifice. For sacrifice is perhaps the most dramatic disavowal of the self-centered individualism that the political society Hobbes envisions is ultimately grounded upon. One finds in oneself the resources to risk and manage sacrifice when one can value the existence of a collective, and what it stands for, more than one's immediate needs and desires. In short, one needs a public ethos and a faith in the public for whom sacrifices are made, and which can in turn promise

redemption for one's sacrifices. This is true not merely for the most conspicuous forms of sacrifice such as military death but also for ordinary forms of political loss and disappointment citizens regularly experience. Rather than transform individual sensibilities in ways that can take the individual out of her immediacy and can thus accommodate sacrifice, Hobbes's solution ultimately results in reverting the individual back to herself and to her immediacy. The relationship between the individual and the collective that she is a part of – and the sovereign that represents that collective – remains formalistic and incapable of garnering genuine attachments and obligations. As such, despite its attempt to generate faith in a secular sovereign and cultivate securer obligations, Hobbes's solution remains blind to the public dimensions of faith that helps people to manage sacrifice and find redemption.

### **Conclusion:**

We have seen in this chapter that the political demand for sacrifice emerges as a formidable problem in Hobbes's discussion of national defense. Unable to resolve the problem through the parameters of the social contract, Hobbes is required – particularly in his historical reflections on the English Civil War – to acknowledge the necessity of faith to account for the sovereign demand for sacrifice. This acknowledgement raises a new problem for Hobbes: what kind of faith can foster the secular political order he envisions? He does not follow the example of other theorists before him – such as Machiavelli, for instance – and invoke ideas of virtue, patriotism, or civil religion. He believes that civil life needs a degree of religion, the seeds of which lie deep in human nature: religion could “never be so abolished out of humane nature, but that new

Religions may againe be made to spring out of them."<sup>110</sup> So, Hobbes attempts to find a solution from within Christianity itself.<sup>111</sup> He thus prescribes a controversial reconstitution of Christian doctrine and sensibilities so that they support obedience to the secular sovereign rather than disobedience and anarchy. Only after this profound transformation through which the civil sovereign becomes the promulgator of doctrine and imposes a new public religion, would it become safe for the sovereign to rely upon religious passions.

At the end, however, Hobbes's abstract individualism and obsessive concern with securitizing Christianity renders him blind to what it is about faith that enables people to respond to the political demand for sacrifice. The new religion he prescribes has two major problems. It is too rationalistic and lacks the power to provoke passionate and imaginative attachments amongst the believers. And, it reverts the individual back to her private immediacy and would therefore face problems in cultivating public sensibilities that are necessary to generate faith in the broader political community and the historical sovereign. As such, Hobbes's new Christianity on its own would not be able to offer a complete solution to the paradox of sacrifice. Like the Hobbesian social contract, his "religion of quiet waiting" lacks the characteristics that are crucial for generating a strong public ethos that the sovereign could rely upon to generate sacrificial citizenship dispositions.

Reading Hobbes's work in this way has important implications for interpreting the theoretical stakes of his political project. First, his complicated engagement with theology and the role of religious passions in shaping behavior suggests that he had a

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<sup>110</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 12: 58.

<sup>111</sup> Palaver, "Hobbes and the Katechon," p 60.

richer and a more insightful understanding of human psychology and political authority than is commonly assumed. He did not, as caricaturist interpretations of *Leviathan* suggest, conceive human beings to be overtly rationalist creatures that are principally motivated by an “affectless opportunism” and an egoistic desire for self-preservation.<sup>112</sup> As we have seen, he was in effect profoundly aware of the ideational and affective grounds of human behavior. He attempted to modify the radically materialist aspects of his theory of political authority and obligation on the basis of a complex engagement with theology and a proposal for a new public religion. Although his attempts to engender a new normative and affective ground in support of secular authority may ultimately remain unable to deliver what they promise, they should offer correctives to his identification as a motivational reductionist and a hard-core materialist.

Second, Hobbes’s concern with keeping the disruptive influence of religion away from the realm of politics invite a revaluation of his place in the history of secularism and toleration. A small number of scholars – including Richard Tuck and Alan Ryan – have challenged Hobbes’s identification as an intolerant absolutist by drawing attention to the historically modern and progressive aspect of Hobbes’s arguments about the privacy of belief and opinion.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, by carving a safe space for private belief and thought, Hobbes should be seen as a modest, but an important defender of political toleration and its utility.<sup>114</sup> Identifying religion as the primary rival of the modern state, which needs to be domesticated and put in the service of the secular sovereign, Hobbes renders faith a

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<sup>112</sup> Holmes, “Introduction,” x-xiii.

<sup>113</sup> Richard Tuck, “The Civil Religion of Thomas Hobbes,” in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, ed. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 120-39; Alan Ryan, “A More Tolerant Hobbes,” in *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Susan Mendus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37-61.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Ryan, “A More Tolerant Hobbes.”

private affair, lacking political ambition and influence. Bequeathing to liberalism this quintessential concern with securitizing religion through privatizing it, Hobbes thus claims an important place in the history of secularism and toleration.

But perhaps more impressively, Hobbes anticipated what would become the dominant model of secular governance in political liberalism. His controversial suggestion that the state should reconstitute religion and religious sensibilities in order to render them compatible with secular sovereignty captures the modern state's attitude towards religion more accurately, I think, than do more normatively inclined proposals for toleration found in the works of John Locke and John Stuart Mill. While contemporary theoretical justifications of secularism as the separation of religious and political spheres and state neutrality towards religion may be indebted to these normative accounts, the practical operations of the liberal secular state are better captured in Hobbes's work. Although it is theoretically supposed to stay away from religion, the secular state operates often precisely as Hobbes suggested it should: by legally and institutionally interfering in the religious realm in order to regulate religion's disruptive political influence. As does Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the secular state also assumes theological roles by deciding what true religion is and how it should be lived. Identifying some religions and some religious practices as deviations and fanaticism, whose influence need to be undermined, secular states support the religious expressions and practices that they consider as truly religious. In short, then, while it lacks the rich normative grounding and ideological strength of secularism offered by other early modern theories of toleration, Hobbes's argument offers a quite accurate depiction of how secular power operates in practice.

Lastly, I would like point out an important and probably unintended consequence of Hobbes's allowance for freedom of private belief and thought. As Schmitt has noted, in leaving room for this freedom, Hobbes's primary concern is public security and the rights of sovereign power. Distrusting their political influence, Hobbes attempts to render individual conscience and private judgment irrelevant to public decisions and practices. Through privatizing conscience, he hopes to eliminate its subversive potential and the political danger it poses to secular sovereignty. However, in the emergent liberal political order, which his theory gives birth to, an important theoretical inversion occurs. While individual freedom of thought and religion become the form giving principles of the new politics, the necessities of public order and the rights of sovereign power are transformed into "mere provisos."<sup>115</sup> With this inversion, conscience is transformed, once again, into a potential *political* danger to the sovereign. Based on their private and conscientious interpretations of political and religious doctrines, individuals can challenge sovereign power and the dominant interpretation of religion upheld in a country. Thus, Hobbes's controversial attempt to overcome the challenge of conscience leaves a contradictory legacy for liberalism. As the protection of freedom of thought and conscience becomes the ultimate measure of the liberal state's legitimacy, conscience regains its power to evaluate, to pass judgment, and indeed to oppose the decisions and the practices of the sovereign. Put differently, although it remains private, conscience is no longer necessarily apolitical. In its privacy, it continues to operate in perpetual political tension with the sovereign, as displayed most clearly through acts of civil disobedience.

In the next chapter, I turn to another influential early modern political theorist, Jean Jacques Rousseau, who, emphasizing the incompleteness of the Hobbesian attempt

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<sup>115</sup> Schmitt, *The Leviathan*, 58.



to resolve the paradox of sacrifice, proposed a different strategy: a civil religion, designed to generate a public faith and patriotic devotion to the popular sovereign.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Rousseau's Civil Religion and Sacrificial Citizenship

In the last chapter, we have seen that Hobbes was unable to provide a solution to the political demand for sacrifice through the theoretical resources of the social contract, and was led first to acknowledge the need for faith in politics, and then to propose a controversial reconstruction of Christianity. This radically transformed religion was to be prorogated through a pedagogical reform directly overseen by the sovereign, and aimed to produce “a love of obedience” and devotion to the secular state, and thereby enable the effective mobilization of the people and the defense of the homeland. Thus, the solution to the paradox of sacrifice ultimately required Hobbes to make a sustained appeal to people's religious sensibilities (through the use of this new public religion), not to self-interest and reason.

In this chapter, we will look at the response of another social contract theorist, Jean Jacques Rousseau, to the sacrificial problematic within the context of developing a democratic theory of political obligation. Unlike Hobbes, Rousseau was remarkably candid about the sacrificial demands of contractual politics, and the need for religion to enable people to manage these demands. He made it clear that “no state has ever been founded without religion being its base,”<sup>1</sup> and praised religion's ability to help people to cope with loss and suffering. But (as it was also the case with Hobbes) this political need for religion raised new problems including a) how to take control of religion and b) how to make sure that it advances political goals. In his response to these questions, Rousseau was in partial agreement with Hobbes. With respect to the first issue of control, he

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. and introduced by Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1968), Book 4, Chapter 8, 180.

praised Hobbes's strategy of unifying religious and political authority at the hands of the sovereign, and of making the sovereign the sole judge and interpreter of the Scripture:

Of all the Christian authors, the philosopher Hobbes is the only one who saw clearly both the evil and the remedy, and who dared to propose reuniting the two heads of the eagle and fully restoring that political unity without which neither the state nor the government will ever be well constituted.<sup>2</sup>

But while accurate about the need for the unification of religion and politics, Rousseau thought Hobbes was mistaken in his response to the second issue of ensuring that religion would advance the interests of the secular sovereign. While recognizing that most of the existing traditional forms of Christianity were dangerous for civil sovereignty – principally because of the dual sovereignties model – Hobbes nonetheless tried to resolve the danger from within Christianity – that is, by offering a radically reconstituted version of Christian doctrine, which was made compatible with secular sovereignty. He failed to see that “the dominant spirit of Christianity was incompatible with his system, and that the interests of the prince will always be stronger than that of the state.”<sup>3</sup>

Rousseau's charges here are twofold. He first suggests that by not getting rid of Christian doctrine altogether, Hobbes left the sovereign vulnerable against potential revivals of the religious spirit. He then claims that Hobbes's solution empowered the particular ruler over the state. It is debatable whether Rousseau's first charge is fair. The previous chapter has shown that Hobbes, in fact, put remarkable energy in erasing “the dominant spirit of Christianity” from his reconstituted version, which emphasized docility and obedience. This was one of the reasons why the new Christianity – “a

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 180.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.; Book 4, Chapter 8, 180.

religion of quiet waiting” – was found to lack the affective capacities and enabling passions that are necessary to generate genuine devotion to the state. But, Rousseau’s second criticism seems more on point, especially if we remember that Hobbes’s suggestion was designed to favor an essentially monarchical system of governance. Regardless, Rousseau found Hobbes’s proposal for a new Christianity unsatisfactory.

This frustration led Rousseau to move beyond Hobbes’s position, and propose a perhaps more controversial strategy. If religion is essential for strong politics that can command sacrifice, and if Christianity – in any form – cannot be the remedy, Rousseau suggests that the sovereign must construct a purely civil profession of faith – a civil religion whose sole aim is to cultivate patriotic attachments and moral capacities required for strong citizenship.

In this chapter, I will examine Rousseau’s account of civil religion as it relates to the paradox of sacrifice. As I hope to show, the theory of civil religion that Rousseau develops is different and more complex than the accounts presented by previous theorists in the civic republican tradition such as Machiavelli. In particular, I will argue that for Rousseau civil religion is neither purely civil nor merely a political tool to be instrumentally used by the sovereign – as it is conventionally assumed about civil religion. Instead, it involves a much more intimate engagement with the idea of conscience and ethical theology than is commonly allowed – and thus includes complex accommodations of theological arguments. As I will later suggest it is this Rousseauian legacy that helps explain the close relationship with traditional religions in many modern formulations of civil religion.

The chapter will proceed in several sections. The first few sections will provide a brief summary of Rousseau's account of the social contract, with specific emphasis on its sacrificial characteristics and how Rousseau attempts to justify them. I will then focus on his account of civil religion and why he thought Christianity to be irredeemably injurious for the kind of politics he envisioned. The final sections will make the point that Rousseau's short description of civil religion in the last chapter of *The Social Contract* is not adequate to understand the special character and full significance of his influential formulation of civil religion. Lacking emotive depth and the capacity to generate the moral transformation Rousseau's project requires, this formulation of civil religion is not convincing and would most likely fail to cultivate the passions that could enable people to respond to the sovereign demand for sacrifice. On this basis, I will propose taking Rousseau's theorization of the "religion of conscience," presented in *Emile*, as the necessary ground of his understanding of civil religion. The chapter will conclude with reflections on how my proposed reading of Rousseau's civil religion may help inform our analysis of contemporary civil religions.

### **Sacrifice in the Social Contract**

While sacrifice has emerged as a formidable paradox for Hobbes's theory of political obligation and sovereignty, in Rousseau work, it does not appear to be a problem. In the first instance, unlike Hobbes, Rousseau does not posit, as the primary source of human motivation, the kinds of psychological traits that render sacrifice a theoretically unlikely prospect. In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau acknowledges two natural human motivations to exist prior to the development of reason and

sociability: self-preservation and pity. The first motivation makes us “ardently interested in our well-being,” and to that extent, it theoretically holds the potential to inhibit motivations entailing risks to one’s immediate security.<sup>4</sup> However, the other natural drive that exists alongside self-preservation, pity, mitigates the “ferocity” of the desire for self-preservation.<sup>5</sup> Inspiring “a natural repugnance to seeing any sentient being, especially our fellow man, perish or suffer,”<sup>6</sup> it facilitates sympathy and hence, sociable practices.<sup>7</sup> Of course, the existence of this natural sentiment cannot guarantee that people would engage in community-oriented practices, let alone endanger themselves for others. But, it suggests that Rousseau’s theory of human nature, unlike Hobbes’s, accommodates the resources that may enable community consciousness and social affection.

But it is in Rousseau’s account of the social contract that we get the most transparent theoretical accommodation of sacrifice. Like other social contract theorists, Rousseau uses this theoretical device to explain how political societies came into being. In his rendering, people living in natural conditions are gradually driven towards forming organized communities, promising security for all. Unlike Hobbes, for Rousseau, a selfish instinct for self-preservation and the desire to relieve the suffering of the natural

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” in *Basic Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company: 1987), 53. Thenceforth referred to as “Second Discourse,” within the text.

<sup>5</sup> Rousseau here disagrees with Hobbes’s theorization of the state of nature. In presenting a natural condition overpowered by the influence of self-interest, Hobbes not only ignored the other natural sentiment, “pity,” but also was guilty of a mistaken historical projection. He “wrongly injected into the savage man’s concern for self-preservation the need to satisfy a multitude of passions, which are the product of society and which have made laws necessary.” Thus, before the development of modern civilization, self-interest was not as complex and overpowering as Hobbes presumed, and consequently, did not necessarily operate as a disruptive force. *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 55. The power of this natural sentiment [pity] is so strong that it has the potential to move even under corrupt political societies, wherein “most depraved mores,” such as envy, greed, and competition dominate. As an example, Rousseau points out the modern public’s response to the suffering of others depicted in theaters. In tragedies, one witnesses that even those spectators who otherwise lack virtue (and might not hesitate to engage in self-seeking acts if they had the power and the chance to), get teary-eyed in the sight of other people’s suffering. *Ibid.*, 56.

condition is not the sole reason behind this development. It is also the new needs generated by increasing human interdependence that leads people to “uniting their separate powers in a combination strong enough to overcome any resistance, uniting them so that their powers are directed by a single motive and act in concert.”<sup>8</sup> A multiplicity of individuals thus transforms themselves into *a people* by agreeing to subject the protection of their persons and goods to the unified and absolute force of the collective. Rousseau describes “the essentials” of the contract as follows:

Each one of us puts into the community his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will; and as a body, we incorporate every member as an indivisible part of the whole. Immediately, in the place of the individual person of each contracting party, this act of association creates an artificial and corporate body composed of as many members as there are voters in the assembly, and by this same act that body acquires its unity, its common *ego*, its life and will.<sup>9</sup>

The emergent political order is legitimate because it is based on the rule of law, which people (as citizens) collectively and directly legislate. Theoretically, citizens remain as free as before because they consent to obey only those laws that they have themselves made, and thus realize a new form of self-mastery and moral liberty. They further engage in public deliberation that produces the “general will,” the “enlightened self-interest of each member,” directed at the common good.<sup>10</sup> Thus, through facilitating this dual relation of acquiring, on the one hand, an ethico-political form of individual

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<sup>8</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 1, Chapter 6, 59-60. For a more detailed examination of this process, see Victor Gourevitch, “Introduction,” in *The Discourses and the Other Early Political Writings*, ed.

Victory Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 6, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 3, 72.

freedom, and on the other, a new political existence as part of the sovereign collective, Rousseau's social contract aspires to provide a solution to the fundamental problem of retaining personal independence in subjection to the rule of law.<sup>11</sup>

This account of mutual protection and civic freedom is dependent upon a series of sacrifices, however. At the most basic level, in addition to the natural rights and freedoms given up at the inauguration of the civil society, general will requires perpetual forfeiture of private wills and judgments in favor of its decisions.<sup>12</sup> Each time individual judgments and desires conflict with the general will, they must be considered mistaken, and forfeited.<sup>13</sup> Crucially, the refusal to do so legitimizes the constraining of the dissenting voice by the sovereign.<sup>14</sup>

But, the most dramatic form of sacrifice the contract entails is that of life itself. Rousseau raises this topic first within the context of analyzing the limits of sovereign power. Emphasizing the absolute character of sovereign power – “Just as nature gives each man an absolute power over all its members, the social pact gives the body politic an absolute power over all its members”<sup>15</sup> –, he suggest that the only limit is that the sovereign may not “impose on the subjects any burden which is not necessary for the community.”<sup>16</sup> But it quickly becomes clear that this proviso does not constitute a significant limitation on the rights of the sovereign as Rousseau continues to suggest that it is the sovereign alone who is the ultimate judge of what is necessary for the community.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 6, 60.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 3, 72.

<sup>13</sup> Roger D. Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 349.

<sup>14</sup> In Rousseau's notorious formulation, it is tacitly implied in social contract that “whoever refuses to obey the general will” would be justifiably “constrained to do so by the whole body.” Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 1, Chapter 7, 64.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 4, 74.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 4, 75.



After putting aside the theoretical problem about limits, Rousseau continues to address more concrete cases of the demand for sacrifice such as national defense. On the surface, it may be objected that the state, which was created “as a means of presenting the lives of every citizen” could also demand from the citizens to “go into battle and perhaps be killed,” and thereby act contrary to its promises?<sup>17</sup> But Rousseau takes issue with this formulation of the problem, and offers a competing interpretation of what the contract actually entails:

The purpose of the social treaty is the preservation of the contracting parties. Whoever wills the end wills also the means, and certain risks, even certain casualties are inseparable from these means. Whoever wishes to preserve his own life at the expense of others must give his life for them when it is necessary. Now, as citizens, no man is judge any longer of the danger to which the law requires him to expose himself, and when the prince says to him: ‘It is expedient for the state that you should die,’ then he should die, because it is only on such terms that he has lived in security as long as he has and also because his life is no longer the bounty of nature but a gift he has received conditionally from the state.<sup>18</sup>

This passage raises several important clarifications to the initial presentation of the social contract. In the first instance, Rousseau now implies that although individuals participate in the social contract to secure their own existence, once the sovereign is created, a dual transformation occurs. While each person becomes a part of the sovereign as citizens, the ultimate end of the contract is re-configured as the preservation of the sovereign, by whose power each is to be preserved. In the case of a foreign attack, the only way to

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<sup>17</sup> Masters, *The Political Philosophy*, 330.

<sup>18</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 2, Chapter 5, 78-9.

realize this end is to organize a common defense. This would certainly endanger the lives of those who are called to arms. But this risk is inseparable, not contradictory, to the drive towards self-preservation that originally motivated the contract – and one individual knew might be possible when they entered the contract.<sup>19</sup> So, theoretically, in national defense, citizens are working towards prolonging their lives – if only by risking it.<sup>20</sup> The logic of the contract that subsumes the individual – and her judgment about how life could best be preserved – within the collective body of the sovereign hereby renders sacrifice as a precondition of the contract and its promise of preservation.

Moreover, in addition to being a way of furthering one's own preservation, sacrifice becomes a form of political exchange. As the above characterization of life as a conditional gift (received from the state) indicates, consent brings with it a responsibility to reciprocate this sovereign gift. So, when citizens risk their lives in defense of the sovereign:

What more are they doing but giving back what they have received from the state? What are they doing that they would not do more often, and at greater peril,

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<sup>19</sup> Rousseau makes this point within the context of differentiating the legitimacy of the sovereign's right to ask citizens to risk their lives from the illegitimacy of suicide: "Every man has the right to risk his own life in order to preserve it. Has it ever been said that a man who leaps out of a window to escape from a fire is guilty of suicide? Would the same crime be imputed to a man who perishes in a storm on the grounds that he knew of the danger when they embarked." Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 5, 78.

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau's discussion of the death penalty draws upon a similar logic: "It is in order to avoid becoming the victim of a murderer that one consents to die if one becomes a murderer oneself. Far from taking one's life under the social treaty, one thinks only of assuring it, and we shall hardly suppose that any of the contracting parties contemplates being hanged." Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 5, 79. As Roger Masters explains, citizens willingly consent to punish criminals "since to fail to do so would establish the freedom of any man to kill or rob him. Even the potential murderer must will the death for murder as soon as he generalizes his will and considers the effects of establishing a law permitting the murder of any citizen (hence of himself)." Thus, it is in order to preserve one's own right to live in a secure society, governed by just laws that one consents to endow the sovereign with the right to inflict death on murderers and traitors. Masters, *The Political Philosophy*, 331.

in the state of nature, where every man is inevitably at war and at the risk of his life, defends whatever serves him to maintain life.<sup>21</sup>

Sacrifice hereby turns out to be a form of payment in kind for the benefits one has received from the state, as well as a means of fostering their continuing delivery.

Finally, Rousseau recasts the sovereign demand for sacrifice as an act of the general will, and thereby turns it into a form of self-imposed obligation. What distinguishes the political society inaugurated through the contract from the state of nature (and thus makes it legitimate) is the fact that in it, it is the law that decides when lives will be exposed to danger, not arbitrary circumstances or decisions. Because citizens participate in the determination of the general will, sovereign decisions that asks citizens to risk their lives are theoretically self-imposed obligations. The contract's premises further imply that requesting exemption from such obligations would violate the principle of formal equality, and would be unjust. It would be "seeking to enjoy the rights of a citizen without doing the duties of a subject."<sup>22</sup> So, when the general will decides it is the duty of all (or a designated group) to participate in national defense, it is a crime to run away from this duty: "None may leave the country to evade his duty, or avoid saving his country when it need him. In such a case, flight would be criminal and punishable."<sup>23</sup> Presented as a self-imposed obligation equally implicating the members of the community, sacrifice thus becomes a virtuous citizenship practice.

If sacrifice is an integral aspect of Rousseau's social contract and the citizenship practices it entails, the cultivation of the affective dispositions and moral capacities that would enable citizen to manage this demand becomes a crucial issue for his political

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<sup>21</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 2, Chapter 4, 77-8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 7, 64.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Book 3, chapter 18, 148.

project. Rousseau thinks that the formal laws or “principles of rights” described in *The Social Contract* cannot, on their own, provide the conditions necessary for the development of these affective capacities. Other resources are necessary to generate the citizenship ethos that can accommodate the sacrificial obligations entailed in the contract. In an attempt to overcome this problem, Rousseau develops a complex theory of civil religion – a profession of public faith, understood as a form of civic patriotism that sustains a strong public ethos and individual sensibilities that could accommodate the difficult obligations of citizenship.

The theory of civil religion is developed primarily in the last chapter of *The Social Contract*. But before we proceed to examine this account which does not offer a concrete sense of what this civil religion would look like (or how it could be perpetuated), it would be helpful first to turn to Rousseau’s discussion of patriotism in his other works and especially in his late work the *Considerations on the Government of Poland*.<sup>24</sup> It is particularly in this latter work (rather than *The Social Contract*) that Rousseau describes some of the concrete rituals and practices that he finds to be crucial for generating a patriotic ethos and strong citizenship dispositions. Therefore, the familiarity with this related discussion would help make better sense of what kind of patriotism Rousseau has in mind when he offers his theoretical model for a civil religion in *The Social Contract*.

### **Patriotism and Spartan Citizenship**

Rousseau’s theory of patriotism is developed as part of his critique of modern civilization, which is identified as a major threat to the realization of a civic republican

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<sup>24</sup> Thenceforth referred to as *The Government of Poland*. The book was written quite late in Rousseau’s career, at the request of the Polish Convention at Balia to recommend a new constitution for the Polish nation.

ethos. Rousseau's principal charge against modern civilization is its transformation of the salutary passion of self-love (*amour de soi*) into its dangerous and selfish form, *amour propre*.<sup>25</sup> In Rousseau's account, *amour propre* refers to a competitive form of self-love that makes individuals excessively concerned with their perception and esteem in comparison to others. It is the sentiment "that is relative, artificial, born in society, which moves each individual to value himself more than anyone else, which inspires in men all the evils they cause one another."<sup>26</sup> Provoking competition, conflict, and resentment, *amour propre* destroys the bonds of social affection.

The development of *amour propre*, and the competitive public spirit it inaugurates is linked to the emergence of inequality, another unsavory characteristic of modern society.<sup>27</sup> Of course, inequality is also a distinguishing aspect of the natural condition. People naturally differ with respect to their physical strength and other talents. But what happens with modern developments is that artificial inequalities, which do not correspond to differences in talent, become the ultimate measure of a person's worth. While private property is the most transparent form assumed by this kind of artificial inequality, inequalities of status and rank are also prominent. Breeding conflict and discontent, the

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<sup>25</sup> There is no consensus in the scholarly translation of this term. It is variously rendered as "vanity," "egoism," or "pride. While Rousseau sometimes acknowledges the potential good uses of *amour propre* (for instance, as national pride), it is often described as a negative passion. See Graeme Garrard's summary of the various forms the term has been used by Rousseau. Graeme Garrard, *Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 139-40.

<sup>26</sup> Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," 106.

<sup>27</sup> "Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had a value... And this was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice. From these first preferences were born vanity and contempt on the one hand, and shame and envy on the other. Rousseau, "Discourse," Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," 64.

development of inequality thus inaugurates the warlike existence that scholars like Hobbes mistakenly associated with the state of nature.<sup>28</sup>

The resultant state of war finally leads to the institutionalization of the “liberal social contract,” rendering permanent the decline in morals brought by the historical progress.<sup>29</sup> The liberal social contract (theorized by Hobbes and Locke) is a fraudulent arrangement that “stabilizes inequality, and gives an appearance of legitimacy to the dominance of some over others.”<sup>30</sup> For Rousseau, as Carole Pateman observes, the ideological justification of the liberal contract – that is secures the natural rights of all citizens – is a “superb form of political mystification,” covering the inequalities of civil society under a façade of formal equality and freedom.<sup>31</sup> Most importantly, with its strong emphasis on private property and individual interests, it blunts public spirit and individual capacities for virtuous citizenship. As such, it sustains the social conditions that Rousseau condemns (and eventually hopes to transform) as detrimental to the development of the moral characteristics required by strong citizenship.

While these historical developments may be unfortunate, Rousseau accepts that there is no going back. Modern developments cannot be reversed. However, existing society can be reconfigured so that it can sustain civic spirit and virtuous conduct. While Rousseau’s social contract provides the framework for this reconfiguration, patriotism would help cultivate the affective resources required for its success. Rousseau’s theory of patriotism is presented through comparisons between modern conditions and ancient

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<sup>28</sup> Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, 147. In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau writes: “Emerging society gave way to the most horrible state of war; since the human race, vilified and desolated, was no longer able to retrace its steps or give up the unfortunate acquisitions it had made.” Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 68.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 142-3.

virtue. As Judith Shklar has observed, these comparisons serve a dual function in Rousseau's work. Negatively, they hold a mirror at contemporary European society, revealing the lack of public spirit and heroism in it. Positively, however, they help Rousseau draw "an image of the perfectly socialized man, the citizen whose entire life is absorbed by his social role" – the blueprint of the patriotic citizen his political project aims to create, and requires for its success.<sup>32</sup>

The paradigmatic examples of ancient republics Rousseau invokes are Israel, Sparta, and Rome. But, it is Sparta in particular that captures his imagination. While the Spartan model makes its appearance early on in Rousseau's career, in the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, where it is portrayed as the "polar opposite of modern actuality,"<sup>33</sup> its political prominence becomes most apparent in *the Government of Poland*. As Willmoore Kendall points out, Sparta is here held up the model "to be emulated for the hardihood and simplicity of its citizens, but most of all for unparalleled devotion to the state."<sup>34</sup> The Spartan genius is the creation of a public life wherein citizens display an intense piety towards the state and its institutions. The principal person who deserves the praise for this accomplishment is the legislator Lycurgus:

He [Lycurgus] saw to it that the image of the fatherland was constantly before their [citizens] eyes – in their laws, in their games, in their homes, in their mating, in their feasts. He saw to it that they never had an instant of free time that they could call their own. And out of this ceaseless constraint, made noble by the purpose it served, was born that burning love of country which was always the

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<sup>32</sup> Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizen* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>34</sup> Willmoore Kendall, introduction to *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, by Jean Jacques Rousseau (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), xxxii.

strongest – or rather the only – passion of the Spartans, and which transformed them into being more than merely human.<sup>35</sup>

To produce the patriotic citizen thoroughly consummated by the love of country, Lycurgus had to kill the individual, but Rousseau thinks that the murder was accomplished in the name of a sublime purpose. As a result, Spartans were reborn as citizens who were more than “merely human,” carrying their city to ever-expanding influence and glory.<sup>36</sup>

Following this ancient wisdom, Rousseau advises the Poles to create a distinctive national ethos and patriotic culture as a remedy for their ailing state and institutions. Each citizen should completely identify with the fatherland, and come to consider public service as the ultimate virtue and source of happiness. To accomplish this task, Rousseau recommends the use of modern institutions such as national education and the militia. National education must be reformed, and pioneer the cultivation of the moral capacities necessary for patriotic citizenship. The militia, on the other hand, would enable the transformation of each citizen into a potential soldier, while also providing a solution to the inefficiency of standing armies – which Rousseau condemns for being “the scourge and ruin of Europe,”<sup>37</sup> – and the immorality of using mercenaries. In addition to these institutions, the state must make use of public events and festivities to transform everyday life itself into a pedagogical venue for the cultivation of patriotism. Through their participation in public contests, school games, and commemorative events, citizens must

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<sup>35</sup> Rousseau, *The Government of Poland*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Rousseau writes that the “sheer force of legislation” made Sparta and the “lawgiver and capital to all of Greece and caused the Persian empire to tremble.” *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.



constantly perceive their collective self, and learn to love and take pride in it.<sup>38</sup> Only then, Rousseau suggests, they will “do by inclination and passionate choice the things that men motivated by duty and interest never do quite well enough.”<sup>39</sup>

In sum, patriotic attachments, inculcated through education, the militia, public festivals, and so forth, turns out to be crucial for preparing the citizens for the strong citizenship obligations inhering in the contract, especially sacrifice. Reviving a virtuous public spirit modeled on the ancient republics, these patriotic bonds enable subjects to perform their citizenship duties with courage and enthusiasm.

### **Religion and Politics**

In *The Social Contract*, the most important political institution that Rousseau attributes the task of generating the above-described patriotic devotion is civil religion. As I have already pointed out, Rousseau’s discussion of civil religion in the last chapter of the book is confusing and controversial. It is confusing because it raises questions about Rousseau’s overall political project that emphasizes democratic autonomy based on the rule of law, but ends with a call for a civil religion – a form of a heteronymous and political-theological appeal – as a requirement of this vision. It is controversial as it involves a fierce attack at existing Christianity, which is portrayed as dangerous for political society. To start the examination of Rousseau’s complex account of civil religion, let us then begin with looking at Rousseau’s broader account of religion in the book and (when relevant) elsewhere in his scholarship, which would help clarify the

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<sup>38</sup> With respect to his point, Rousseau invokes “good uses” of competitive spirit. In public festivals, citizens should compete with each other in excelling patriotic spirit and dedication, thus contributing to the generation of republican virtue.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 12.

discussion that comes at the end. In the following three sections, I will first outline this broader account of religion and why it culminates in a fierce attack at Christianity. I will then continue to examine the characteristic of civil religion, and ask whether it would be able to provide the social contract with the kind of support Rousseau expects from it.

Before its final attack at Christianity, *The Social Contract* presents a rich and highly positive account of the role religion plays in civil society. The most poignant example is the description of political founding:

Whoever ventures on the enterprise of setting up a people must be ready, shall we say, to change human nature, to transform each individual, who is by himself entirely complete and solitary, into a part of a much greater whole, from which that same individual will then receive, in a sense, his life and his being.<sup>40</sup>

The extraordinary task of founding calls for extraordinary forces, capable of establishing the rule of law and transforming solitary individuals into citizens. Rousseau argues that ideally gods would be needed to accomplish this colossal task. But, the people must themselves make the laws in order for the generated political order to be legitimate. The discrepancy between the theological proportions of the task at hand and the apparent limits of human capacities lead Rousseau to propose a dramatic solution through the figure of the lawgiver.<sup>41</sup>

The lawgiver is a god-like figure, devised to mediate the paradox of founding. The extraordinary character of this figure derives from its superior intelligence and the

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<sup>40</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 2, Chapter 7, 84.

<sup>41</sup> John T. Scott, "Politics as the Imitation of the Divine in Rousseau's Social Contract," *Polity* 26: 3 (1994): 495.

nature of the office, “which gives the republic its constitution,” but, has no place in it.<sup>42</sup> Once its task is accomplished, the office of the lawgiver dissolves immediately, never to appear again.<sup>43</sup> But this apparent outsider status of Rousseau’s god-like founder raises some questions. If the lawgiver is unable to enforce the laws and thereby command obedience, how could he convince people to accept, and abide by, his legislation? Theoretically, he can use rational argumentation and demonstrate the wisdom of his laws. But, Rousseau argues that this rationalist method would not work. The sublime reason of the lawgiver is far above the capacity of ordinary people, and as such, it cannot be translated into popular idiom.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, as Rousseau persistently emphasizes, human institutions need a basis more solid (and more captivating) than reason alone.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, at the moment of founding, the lawgiver “must have recourse to an authority of another order, one which compels without violence and persuades without convincing.”<sup>46</sup> This authority, which has the potential to unite a people “prior to or independently of the laws,” is religion.<sup>47</sup>

The broader theoretical argument Rousseau hereby makes is that political founding and autonomous self-governance requires the support of a heteronymous and

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<sup>42</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 2, Chapter 7, 85. The man who frames the law has not nor ought to have any legislative right.” Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 7, 86.

<sup>43</sup> Thus, the law-giver is like an “engineer, who invents the machine,” but shows no aspiration to operate it afterwards. Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 7, 85.

<sup>44</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 2, Chapter 7, 86. See also Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau*, 364.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality.”

<sup>46</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 2, Chapter 7, 87. This statement is rather confusing and has caused debate in the scholarship. Victor Gourevitch offers a helpful insight on Rousseau’s distinction between persuasion and conviction: “Traditionally, to persuade is to move to action; to convince is to demonstrate or to prove; persuasion is properly the province of philosophy or science.” Victor Gourevitch, “The Religious Thought,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 240. In the light of this account, the persuasion the law-giver can be interpreted to aim at an incitation to action (obedience) that need not depend on prior demonstration or proof.

<sup>47</sup> Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau*, 364.

extra-legal force.<sup>48</sup> The discussion of the lawgiver helps Rousseau present the theoretical structure of this necessity, which is modeled on theological argumentation. Specifically, Rousseau suggests that the founders of nations must attribute their wisdom to transcendental sources, and thereby enhance the obligatory nature and force of the political system they inaugurate. In other words, the establishment of a new regime involves its sanctification through an appeal to the theological – a mystical and transcendent grounding that could provide the community with sacred meaning and emotional bearing purely secular formulations of the political can apparently not. This is how, as Rousseau’s famously put, religion serves as “the instrument of politics” at the birth of nations.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, Rousseau suggests that this necessary persistence of the political-theological within autonomous self-governance takes away from the subjects “the fatal right” to dispose of the laws and founding institutions, and thereby also contributes to the preservation of the political order and sovereignty.<sup>50</sup> In Rousseau’s words, political order is in this way imbued with a form of necessity that has the potential to transform liberty from individual license to a rule-bound civic freedom:

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<sup>48</sup> In fact, as John Scott points out, the reliance on extra legal institutions and support to preserve the political whole and the citizenry continues even after the dissolution of the office of the law-giver: “Rousseau discusses these institutions – ‘mores, customs, and especially opinion’ – within his classification of laws, itself a striking indication of the insufficiency of laws properly speaking (enactments of the general will). This extra legal legislation is ‘a part to which the great legislator attends in secret while appearing to limit himself to the particular regulations that are merely the sides of the arch of which mores, slower to arise, form at last the unshakeable keystone.’ After the legislator’s role has been performed, these institutions, customs, mores, and opinions will serve the denaturing role he took upon himself.” Scott, “Politics as the Imitation of the Divine,” 497-8.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 7, 88.

<sup>50</sup> Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” 76.

For then the people, feeling subject to the laws of the state as they are to those of nature, and detecting the same hand in the creation of both man and the nation, obey freely and bear with docility the yoke of the public welfare.<sup>51</sup>

At the end, it appears that it is the political theological argument that enables the realization of the overarching political aspiration of Rousseau's social contract, that is, the establishment of positive freedom with obedience and obligation.

The other substantial support religion and theological arguments provide the sovereign with concerns the performance of citizenship obligations. Rousseau's description of how individuals learn to fulfill their duties (even when it is against their individual interests to do so) in his pedagogical treatise *Emile* helps clarify this point. *Emile* was penned the same year Rousseau wrote *The Social Contract*. It provides a model education that is designed to ensure citizens' loyalty and commitment to the republic. What is particularly relevant for our purposes is Rousseau's description of the three-stage development of the sense of duty in the book. The first stage of the inculcation of duty involves the introduction of the pupil, Emile, to the idea of property rights. Rousseau presents an elaborate story, which goes as follows. After having been encouraged by his tutor to grow beans in the garden, Emile one day finds out that under the secret instruction of the tutor, the gardener Robert uprooted the bean seeds he had cultivated and torn up his plot.<sup>52</sup> An investigation reveals that before Emile, Robert had planted Maltese melon seeds in the same plot, and "having also mixed his labor with soil and being the first occupant to boot," he has "a better claim to the land than Emile has."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 2, Chapter 7, 87.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or on Education* (U.S: Basic Books, 1979), 98.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Marks, "The Divine Instinct? Rousseau and Conscience," *The Review of Politics* 68: 4 (2006), 572.

As a solution, the tutor proposes that the gardener grant Emile a share of land on the condition that “he will have half the produce.”<sup>54</sup> In response, Emile promises to stay away from the gardener’s share.

This arrangement has the merit of inculcating in Emile a respect for property rights and social relations based on contracts. However, it is not sufficient to prepare him for the kinds of obligations he would be expected to fulfill in civil society. The primary problem is that the proposed contract appeals only to Emile’s self-interest, and its outcome clearly favors him. Not only will the gardener grow melons, which eventually Emile will use, but, contrary to the tutor’s initial proposal, the gardener also grants Emile the use of half of the garden “without conditions.”<sup>55</sup> Unlike this arrangement, Emile’s relations in civil society will not favor him all the time. To be prepared for his civic life and its responsibilities, Emile must therefore “learn not only to sacrifice his short-term interest for his long-term interest but also to sacrifice his interest for his duty.”<sup>56</sup>

Given the insufficiency of this first appeal to self-interest, in the second stage of Emile’s education, the tutor decides to make use of a natural sentiment, gratitude. Gratitude is derivative of self-love, and involves a natural affection for what preserves us and what does us good. It provides people with a capacity to appreciate and reciprocate the kindness and assistance they received. The idea is that if Emile develops feelings of gratitude for the persons and institutions of authority, such as his tutor, this sentiment would naturally lead him to compliance with their commands, and as such generate willing obedience. But, as Jonathan Marks notes, gratitude is also insufficient to sustain the citizenship duties entailed in the social contract. This natural sentiment requires a

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<sup>54</sup> Rousseau, *Emile*, 99.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>56</sup> Marks, “The Divine Instinct?” 573.

relatively naïve certainty that laws, institutions, and people whom we interact with in civil society intend to assist us even when it may not be immediately clear that this is the case. Political life involves conflict, opposition, disappointment, and loss. And such a certainty cannot be consistently maintained under contentious conditions. Thus, a form of obligation based on gratitude would not be sufficient to generate the strong obligations the social contract requires.

Unable to engender a reliable sense of duty through the use of the above resources, Emile's tutor finally turns to the help of religion. As Jonathan Marks describes "duty emerges only after Emile's religious education, after he and the governor "rise from the study of nature to the quest for its Author":

When we have gotten there, what new holds we have given ourselves over our pupil .... It is only then that he finds his true interest in being good, in doing good far from the sight of men and without being forced by the laws, in being just between God and himself, in fulfilling his duty, even at the expense of his life.<sup>57</sup>

Elsewhere the governor further notes that it is through appeals to "the Eternal Being" that you "engrave the memory of what you say to him in the depths of his heart."<sup>58</sup> These comments suggest that it is religion and the awareness of "the Eternal Being" that ultimately sparks in Emile's heart and conscience the light of duty. He apparently learns to fulfill his duties without being coerced and even when it is manifestly against his interests to do so only after his religious education.

However, Rousseau does not describe the content of Emile's religious education. We do not know, for instance, to what extent the understanding of religion Emile is

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<sup>57</sup> Rousseau, *Emile*, 314.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Marks, "The Divine Instinct?" 573.

taught resembles other accounts of religion presented in the book – most importantly, Rousseau’s account of the faith of the Savoyard Vicar, which we will address later in the chapter. In the absence of such description, what we simply know is that it is Emile’s religious education that finally makes him virtuous (and consequently a good citizen).<sup>59</sup> The idea is that inspiring an internal mechanism of control and discipline, faith in “the Eternal Being” strengthens the sense of duty and enables individuals to fulfill their obligations without the need for surveillance and even when obedience entails dangers to one’s life. Thus, although we do not know what kind of a religion this is that prepares Emile for his obligations, it is clear that Rousseau thinks some form of religion to be crucial for education in civic duties.

In light of this background, it is not surprising that Rousseau’s political writing portrays religion and theological appeals as necessary for the performance of the obligations deriving from citizenship. As he clearly stated in *The Social Contract*: “It is very important to the state that each citizen should have a religion,” for it is religion that “makes him love his duty.”<sup>60</sup> Of course, in an ideal republic, laws themselves must perform this function, but given the complexity of social conditions and inevitable tendency towards corruption, there is no guarantee that they would always succeed. So laws must be supported by faith.<sup>61</sup> With its ability to inspire lawful action without coercion, religion thus appears to be a crucial ally of the laws.

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<sup>59</sup> Marks, “The Divine Instinct?” 582.

<sup>60</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8, 185.

<sup>61</sup> In this context, Rousseau flatly rejects the radical Enlightenment arguments concerning the irrelevance of faith to political society. He attacks, in particular, Pierre Bayle’s defense of the possibility of a society of atheists on the ground that such a society would be prone to anarchy and disorder. Cf. Garrard, *Rousseau’s Counter-Enlightenment*, 69-76.



Finally, in addition to enhancing the sense of duty, Rousseau suggests that religion enables people to cope with the consequences of their compliance with laws. Given the centrality of sacrifice to the citizenship practices involved in the contract, religion's promise of an afterlife is especially important with respect to this point.<sup>62</sup> Rousseau writes: "In every State that can require its members to sacrifice their lives, anyone who does not believe in the afterlife is necessarily a coward or a madman."<sup>63</sup> In the face of seemingly impossible expectations that manifestly entail risks to their lives, people must have faith that there will be a final reckoning and afterlife, when their obedience and sacrifice will be rewarded. Strengthening the affective grounds of political obligation by providing people with this assurance and comfort, religion thus appears to be a crucial political resource and moral necessity required for sound citizenship.

### **The Attack Against Christianity**

Given this persistent emphasis on the political significance of religion in the rest of the book, why then does Rousseau attack Christianity in the last chapter of *The Social Contract*? The reason is related to a conceptual distinction between religions that are "serviceable to a robust constitution of the state," and those that are "injurious" – a point of debate amongst the *philosophes* at the time of Rousseau's writing.<sup>64</sup> As articulated in a

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<sup>62</sup> This is also important for the prolonging of virtue. If there is an inevitable tendency towards corruption in every society and the force of law is not always enough to generate moral behavior, "an individual's practice of moral virtue, amid so many others who are vicious, is a dangerous act of folly unless there is an afterlife." Arthur M. Melzer, "The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity," *The American Political Science Review*, 90: 2 (1996), 351.

<sup>63</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, "Geneva Manuscript," in *On The Social Contract*, ed. Roger R. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 189.

<sup>64</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 9, 180. While disagreeing with the *philosophes* who supported a radical vision of Enlightenment and attacked all religions (such as Helvetius, Naigeon, Diderot, and the Baron d'Holbach), Rousseau shared the more moderate view of those like Voltaire and d'Alembert that not all religion is useful for society Cf. Garrard, *Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment*, 69-76.

letter he wrote to Voltaire, Rousseau thought that “one cannot too forcefully attack the superstition that disturbs society, nor too much respect the religion that upholds it.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, while affirming the political need for religion, Rousseau believed that Christianity was not the kind of religion that could uphold political order.<sup>66</sup> He offered several reasons to support this claim. First, he emphasized that many of the basic Christian dogmas including the original sin, the existence of innate ideas, the theory of revelation, and the belief in miracles are destructive of public order and happiness.<sup>67</sup> These doctrines lead to unnecessary and inconclusive disagreements and discords, and thus foster intolerance and division in society rather than unite people under a common purpose. As many of the *philosophes* at the time recommended, they must indeed be purged from popular culture and social imaginary.<sup>68</sup>

But, the trouble with Christianity went well beyond these doctrinal issues. In fact, Rousseau argued that it was altogether inimical to the form of sovereignty he envisioned. The most obvious problem is Christianity’s division of sovereignty between political and religious authority, which introduced a conflicting system of loyalty. While the direct target of this critique is Catholicism (“the religion of the priest”), the division of sovereignties is not restricted to the Catholic version of Christianity.<sup>69</sup> As pointed out in the context of Rousseau’s praise of Hobbes’s attempt to unite “the two heads of the eagle,”

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<sup>65</sup> Rousseau, “Letter to Voltaire,” in *Rousseau: The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1997), 244.

<sup>66</sup> While I would not be able to describe this point in detail, Rousseau’s critique of Christianity is part of a longstanding civic republican tradition. For instance, Machiavelli similarly attacked Christianity in the *Discourses* for its devaluation of honor, and glorification of passive martyrdom; for teaching people to be humble, self-abnegating, and contemptuous of worldly things; for making the world effeminate; for rendering heaven important; and so forth. For a detailed examination, see Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 18-20.

<sup>67</sup> Garrard, *Rousseau’s Counter-Enlightenment*, 70. See also, Victor Gourevitch, “The Religious Thought,” 193-247.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Rousseau, “Letter to Voltaire,” 232-47.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 12-3.

it inhered in the very “spirit of Christianity.”<sup>70</sup> Rousseau commented that the “dual sovereignty model” went as far back as Jesus’ establishment of his spiritual kingdom on earth.<sup>71</sup> As a result of the historical perpetuation of this model, an “endless conflict of jurisdiction” has always been the fate of Christian states “where man have never known whether they ought to obey the civil ruler or the priest.”<sup>72</sup> The evils introduced by this division of loyalties are so manifest that Rousseau deems it “worthless” to demonstrate them further.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, the Christian ideal of universal benevolence and brotherhood was politically problematic. Rousseau associated universalism with Christianity in its purest and most perfect form – “the Christianity of the Gospel.”

Under this holy, sublime and true religion, men as the children of the same God, look on all others as brothers, and the society which unites them is not even dissolved by death.<sup>74</sup>

From a strictly moral point of view, there is nothing wrong with universal benevolence and brotherhood. In fact, Rousseau concedes the truth and legitimacy of this version of Christianity. But, the situation is different when this humanistic religion, with its stress on the universality of attachments and obligations, becomes the religion of a particular republic. As we have seen in his advice to Poland, in Rousseau’s view, sound politics is necessarily particularistic/nationalist, and aims to focus people’s passions and thoughts on a specific community, rather than expand them. Christian universalism interferes with

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<sup>70</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8, 180.

<sup>71</sup> Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 12.

<sup>72</sup> Rousseau continues, “..this kingdom, by separating the theological system from the political, meant that the state ceased to be a unity, and it caused those intestine divisions which have never ceased to disturb Christian peoples. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8, 178.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 181.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 182.

this possibility. It displays “no specific connection with the body politic,” and as such, “leaves the law only the force the law itself possesses, adding nothing to it.”<sup>75</sup> As the chapter on legislation further clarified, a socially useful religion must lend support to the particular laws upheld in a community. This is how religion operates as “one of the chief bonds” holding the society together.<sup>76</sup> Instead of fulfilling this function, the Christianity of the Gospel “detaches” people’s hearts and minds from the state as well as “from all other things of this world.”<sup>77</sup>

This leads to another, and a more distressing, political consequence of this religion: its spiritual and ascetic orientation. While admitting that true Christians are not disobedient to their rulers and “go through the motions of citizenship” dutifully, Rousseau stressed that they are not actually concerned with this world, and display “a profound indifference towards the good or ill success of their deeds.”<sup>78</sup> True Christians live primarily for the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>79</sup> This other-worldly orientation is a threat to the energy and enthusiasm citizens are expected to display in the performance of their political duties:

Provided that he has nothing to reproach himself for, it does not matter to him whether all goes well or badly here on earth. If the state prospers, he hardly dares to enjoy the public happiness; he fears lest he become proud of his country’s glory; if the state perishes, he blesses the hand of God that weighs heavily on His people.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 182.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 182.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., , Book 4, Chapter 8, 182.

<sup>78</sup> Patrick J. Deneen, *Democratic Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 153.

<sup>79</sup> Rousseau writes: “A the true Christian’s “homeland” is not of this world.” Ibid., 183.

<sup>80</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8, 183.

Unable to completely dedicate themselves to the political sovereign – whose well-being and maintenance must be the burning passion of virtuous citizens –, perfect Christians make imperfect citizens.<sup>81</sup>

Most importantly, Rousseau considers Christian charity and the teaching of nonviolence to be politically dangerous. The advice to “turn the other cheek” makes naïve citizens, who may easily be manipulated.<sup>82</sup> “If, unhappily, there should appear one ambitious man, one hypocrite, one Catilina, for example, or one Cromwell” within such a community:

that man would readily exploit his pious compatriots. Christian charity does not allow us readily to think ill of our neighbors. When a man is cunning enough to master the art of imposing on others, ..there behold, is a man who is given honours. Suppose he abuses the power of which he is the trustee? Then he is the scourge with which God chastises his children. Christians would have scruples about expelling the usurper; for that would mean disturbing the public peace, using violence, shedding blood, all this accords ill with Christian mildness.<sup>83</sup>

As Diana Fourny observed, Rousseau here suggests that even one imperfect member in a community of perfect Christians is “enough to ruin the perfection of all.”<sup>84</sup> Christian citizens would rather watch their state (and along with it themselves) to be carried into ruin on the whims of an ambitious individual, rather than dirty their hands against their brethren.

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<sup>81</sup> “It is said that a people of true Christians would form the most perfect society imaginable. I see but one great flaw in this hypothesis, namely that a society of true Christianity will not be a society of men.” Ibid., 182.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Diana Fourny, “Rousseau’s Civil Religion Reconsidered,” *The French Review* 60 (4) 1987: 485

<sup>83</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8, 183-84.

<sup>84</sup> Diana Fourny, “Rousseau’s Civil Religion Reconsidered,” 490.

But how about a foreign attack, when, under the conditions of impending danger, the teaching of nonviolence could be reevaluated? As pointed out above, Rousseau accepts that in the event of a foreign invasion, Christians would act obediently, as Christianity “preaches servitude.”<sup>85</sup> But obedience on its own does not make good soldiers. Rousseau explains:

Suppose a foreign war breaks out. The citizens will march without reluctance to war; no one among them will think of flight; all will do their duty – but they will do it without passion for victory; they know better how to die than to conquer. It does not matter to them whether they are victors or vanquished. ...Imagine your Christian republic confronted by Sparta or Rome, and your pious Christian will be beaten, crushed, destroyed.”<sup>86</sup>

While obedient, perfect Christians lack the martial fervor that brings glory to a republic. It is true that, as a result of their belief in afterlife and glories awaiting them in case they die during combat, Christian soldiers accept the sacrificial duties imposed on them. But they perform these military duties without patriotic zeal and nationalist sentiment. The overarching passion that animates them is the passion for martyrdom for the glory of God, not so that the republic may live.<sup>87</sup> A strong state does not need soldiers who pursue martyrdom for religious reasons. It requires patriotic citizens who would not mind being martyred for the glory of the nation, and thus swear, first and foremost, “not to conquer or die, but to return as conquerors.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8, 184.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 184.

<sup>87</sup> “And after all what does it matters whether one is free or a slave in his vale of tears? The essential thing is to go to paradise, and resignation is but one more means to that end.” Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 184.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 184.

At this point, Rousseau rejects an obvious counter-example that may be raised against his argument: the military fervor of the Christian troops during the crusades. If Christianity makes bad soldiers, how could the crusades be explained? Rousseau responds to this challenge by disavowing the Christian character of the crusaders' fighting spirit:

They [the crusaders] were far from being Christians. They were the soldiers of priests; ..the citizens of the Church; they were fighting for its spiritual homeland, which it had in some strange way made temporal. Strictly speaking, this comes under the heading of paganism; for since the Gospel never sets up any national religion, holy war is impossible amongst Christians.<sup>89</sup>

The crusading troops were fighting for the honor and the glory of the Church, here in this world, not merely for otherworldly ends. According to Rousseau, this resembled the religious zeal of paganism ("the religion of the citizen") – a form of nationalist religion that joined "divine worship to a love of the laws," rather than contemporary Christianity.<sup>90</sup> By making the homeland "the object of the citizens' adoration," and teaching them that "the service to the state is the service to the tutelary God," the nationalist religions of the past could sustain a pious and patriotic fighting spirit that served this-worldly glory – although Rousseau ultimately disapproved this type of religion as well for having an erroneous basis and being bloodthirsty and intolerant towards other nations.<sup>91</sup> Within the context of the crusades, however, he credited the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 184-5.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 181.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 181-2. Thus, while approving this patriotic/nationalist component in paganism, Rousseau nonetheless disapproves this kind of religion as morally incorrect. This is largely because this religion is "based on errors and lies, it deceives men, and makes them credulous and superstitious; it buries the true worship of God in empty ceremonials. It is bad again, when it becomes exclusive and tyrannical, and makes people bloodthirsty and intolerant, so that men breathe only murder and massacre, and believe

spirit of the pagan nationalist religions inherited by these early Christians for animating the troops with a powerful military fervor. But because Christianity quickly lost this martial spirit in its subsequent development, Rousseau considered the Christianity of his time to be unable to revive this kind of military fervor.

In sum, the above-summarized characteristics of Christianity – division of loyalties, asceticism, universalism, otherworldly orientations, and so forth – render this religion incapable of generating the political assistance a strong state needs. All versions of Christianity that Rousseau addresses (“the Christianity of the Gospel” and “the religion of the priest”) fail in attaching people’s hearts and minds to the secular state, and conflict with republican citizenship and martial heroism. While, it may on the surface seem that Christian obedience and faith in afterlife and martyrdom may make good soldiers, it has also been seen that the primary goal of Christian faith is not the survival and the glory of the nation. As such, it cannot be considered a reliable source of motivation that the state can safely tap onto. Hence Rousseau’s judgment that Christianity (in all its forms) is injurious to a strong constitution of the state.

### **Civil Religion**

In light of this negative account of Christianity, it becomes easier to understand why Rousseau rejected the Hobbesian solution to the paradox of sacrifice (analyzed in the previous chapter) despite agreeing with his insight that control over religion is crucial for the sovereign. But instead of recommending that Christianity must be reconstructed to make it compatible with secular governance – as Hobbes did –, Rousseau offered a

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they are doing a holy deed in killing those who do not accept their Gods. This puts the people concerned in a natural state of war with all others, and this is something destructive of its own security.”



theory of civil religion that could captivate people's imaginaries and make them love their political duties – and thereby fulfill the role attributed to religion in the contractual project.

Like his above described criticism of Christianity, Rousseau's account of civil religion is deeply influenced by the works of previous civic-republican theorists of civil religion, especially Machiavelli. But there are also important differences between Rousseau's and Machiavelli's contribution to this intellectual tradition. First, Rousseau's account claims that civil religion has nothing to do with Christianity. As Beiner observed while Machiavelli was also critical of Christianity – especially for its celebration of slavishness, and its education of humanity to despise liberty and “harsh politics required for the defense of liberty” – he thought all of this could be reversed.<sup>92</sup> More specifically, Machiavelli believed that the problem lied primarily with a false interpretation of Christian teaching. If rightly interpreted, he wrote in the *Discourses*, Christianity teaches that:

“the exaltation and defense of the fatherland is permitted,” that “it wishes us to love and honor it and to prepare ourselves to be such that we can defend it,” and that if we thought otherwise, “it arises without doubt from the cowardice [*vilta*] of the men who have interpreted our religion according to idleness [*l'ozio*] and not according to virtue.”<sup>93</sup>

Putting the blame on false interpretation, Machiavelli thus proceeded to offer a solution that was similar to Hobbes's. He proposed a reinterpretation of Christianity in such away that it comes to resemble the civil religion of the Romans, which ennobled and enhanced

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<sup>92</sup> Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 18-19.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted Ibid., 19.

citizenship – and which, of course, was very different from Hobbes’s reinterpreted version of Christianity. Consequently, Machiavelli’s account of civil religion involves a transformation of Christianity itself into a form of civil religion.

Rousseau, on the other hand, claims that he will provide a “purely civil” theorization of civil religion that has nothing to do with Christianity. In this account, the sovereign has absolute power to determine the articles of civil religion “not strictly as religious dogmas, but as expressions of social conscience, without which it is impossible to be either a good citizen or a loyal subject.”<sup>94</sup> Rousseau’s civil religion has positive and negative dogmas, which are simple and few in number. The positive dogmas include the existence of an omnipotent, intelligent, and benevolent divinity; the life to come; the happiness of the just; the punishment of sinners; and, crucially, the sanctity of the social contract and the law. Negative dogmas are even fewer. In fact, Rousseau limits them to a single one: intolerance, which he considers to be the characteristic of pagan religions and Christianity – both rejected as incompatible with republican citizenship.

Two points are especially important in this very short description of civil religion. The first is the sanctification of the social contract and the law, a point previously raised with respect to the legislator’s recourse to religion at the founding of a nation. The reiteration of this necessity at the end of the book as a permanent function of the civil religion reinforces the view that political institutions are vulnerable without the support of religion, even when they may be the product of the lawgiver’s extraordinary wisdom. Emphasizing this point, some scholars argued that the civil religion chapter marks the failure of Rousseau’s political project. John B. Noone argued, for instance, that “Rousseau was admitting the failure of his, or indeed anyone’s, attempt to provide a

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<sup>94</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8, 186.

purely secular foundation for political obligation.”<sup>95</sup> But, this observation is misleading. Rousseau’s political project is surely not to provide a purely secular foundation for obligation. As we have seen, he is remarkably clear about the necessary recourse to the political theological not only at the founding of nations, but throughout the life of a republic. The principal reason for this is the “impossibly high price” political life exacts from those who would live in it, especially with respect issues of sacrifice.<sup>96</sup> Responding to this problem, the civil religion chapter leaves no doubt that some form of theological appeals is crucial for the cultivation of the moral capacity and affective resources required for strong citizenship. Interpreted this way, the civil religion chapter is a critique of the goal of grounding political obligation on purely secular grounds, not a demonstration of its failure.

The second important characteristic of the description of civil religion is Rousseau’s identification of the belief in it as the criterion for political inclusion and exclusion. On the surface, this argument may seem paradoxical. For Rousseau also acknowledges that the sovereign need not have any business “to take cognizance” of the dogmas citizens believe in.<sup>97</sup> The only exception is when these beliefs concern public morals and duties. But, given that the most significant dogmas of civil religion concern devotion to the social contract and the law, Rousseau argues that the sovereign has the right to banish those who do not believe in these dogmas from the republic, not for impiety per se, but for being unable “to love law and justice, or to sacrifice, if need be,

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<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Terence Ball, “Rousseau’s Civil Religion Reconsidered,” in *Reappraising Political Theory: Revisionist Studies in the History of Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 117.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>97</sup> Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book 4, Chapter 8, 185.

his life to his duty.”<sup>98</sup> Because the protection of the state and the public order is the priority, dissent could justify even capital punishment: “If anyone, after having publicly acknowledging these same dogmas, behaves as if he did not believe in them, then let him be put to death.”<sup>99</sup> These surprisingly harsh comments make clear that the ultimate test of piety for Rousseau is obedience to the laws and the willingness to sacrifice one’s life for duties, which are, tellingly, also the characteristics that make one a good citizen.

At this point, two broader criticisms about Rousseau’s account of civil religion in the last chapter of *The Social Contract* need to be raised. The first concerns the indistinct character of Rousseau’s description of civil religion. Except the additional emphasis on the belief in divinity and afterlife, Rousseau’s description of this profession of faith is not very different from his account of patriotic citizenship elsewhere. As we have seen, in *The Government of Poland*, Rousseau is similarly concerned with the problem of cultivating devotion towards the state, and offers clear strategies and rituals to accomplish this task such as the implementation of central education, civic militias, and public festivities without explicitly invoking the idea of civil religion. What exactly then is specific about civil religion?

A reconsideration of the dogmas included in civil religion may provide a partial response to this problem. With its emphasis on afterlife and the justice to come, the dogmas of the civil religion (like all religions) are designed to offer its adherents a form of coping mechanism with regard to issues of existential meaning such as death and suffering. Coupled with its ability to cultivate patriotic citizenship dispositions, this promise of an afterlife makes civil religion potentially a stronger ethos than the sovereign

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 186.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 186.

could rely upon. Moreover, the negative dogma of civil religion, namely toleration, helps mitigate the exclusionary tendencies conventionally involved in patriotism, and thus provokes more tolerant forms of patriotic attachments. Although Rousseau considers good politics to be particularist, and praises the ability of patriotism to generate strong communal bonds, he also disapproves its tendency to generate intolerance towards other nations. Nationalist religions of the past supported imperialist politics by inspiring warfare and proselytization. This eventually made states tyrannical and the people “bloodthirsty and intolerant,” endangering the security of the state and the nation.<sup>100</sup> This was why Rousseau disapproved of these nationalist religions. Integrating patriotic outlook with toleration, civil religion aspires to temper down the belligerent and exclusivist tendencies attending unregulated patriotism, and thus preserve national security and international peace.

The second and the more important criticism that could be raised against Rousseau’s civil religion chapter is whether it can really provide politics the affective resources necessary to command passionate allegiance to the state. While civil religion promises to assist politics without provoking theological dispute or division of loyalties, its content as Rousseau describes it in *The Social Contract* lacks imaginative richness and raises doubts about its ability to influence and mobilize people in the particular way that Rousseau desires. As I have pointed out while avoiding complex theological doctrines, civil religion contains some dogmas such as the life to come, which Rousseau thinks is crucial for enabling people to manage the demand for sacrifice. But, because Rousseau also wants to prevent Christian otherworldliness and valuation of passive martyrdom, these dogmas are not situated within a broader theological structure that would have

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 182.

strengthened their appeal and ability to persuade. Religions like Christianity have a complicated theological structure and eschatology that animate people's imagination concerning death, salvation, heaven, and so forth; and it is the richness and vivacity of this structure that captures people's imagination; fascinates, scares, and moves them. With its few dogmas that apparently lack emotional bearing and seem unsupported by such a theology and rich resource of meanings, it is doubtful whether this account of civil religion could actually be able to arouse strong passions and inspire sacrifice.

In addition, the completely public character of Rousseau's civil religion is also a serious problem. Religion's power to operate as a strong motivation derives partially from its ability to shape people's identities and desires. People are drawn to act upon religious beliefs because their faith is seen as a reliable resource to provide them with guidance and relief in the face of personal dilemmas and difficulties. But Rousseau's civil religion does not seem concerned at all with these inner dimensions of faith concerning the private self and conscience. Indeed, in a surprisingly liberal vein, civil religion leaves the influence and determination of these crucial domains to the pleasure of the individual. So long as people abide by the civil religion, Rousseau writes, "they may hold whatever opinion they please."<sup>101</sup> But, by leaving the religious subjectivity and inward conditions of the individual off the sovereign hook in this way (as Hobbes's "religious of quiet waiting, it should be remembered, also did), is civil religion not, in a way, defeating its purpose? Can this purely public profession of faith generate genuine persuasion and motivate sacrificial dedications without penetrating into, and determining, the inner domains of the self, and thereby help realize the transformation of the subject into the patriotic and pious citizen?

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., Book 4, Chapter 8, 185.

The short account of civil religion that Rousseau provides in the last chapter of *The Social Contract* offers no response to any of these above raised concerns. But consider thinking through some of these issues on the basis of an alternative reading of Rousseau's civil religion. Following the lead of scholars who have argued that the actual basis of civil religion is not simply the dogmas described in *The Social Contract*, I thus propose considering the "religion of conscience (or sincerity)," which Rousseau describes in a long section of *Emile*, entitled the "Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar," as the necessary component of his theory civil religion.<sup>102</sup> Widely considered to be the summary of Rousseau's own religious beliefs (presented through the voice of a fictitious priest from Savoy), the religion of conscience, taken as the emotive basis of Rousseau's civil religion, may help provide a much richer account of this public professions of faith, especially with respect to issues of persuasion, subject-formation, and motivation. As such, it also helps demonstrate the difference and uniqueness of Rousseau's account of civil religion.

### **The Religion of Conscience**

Let us first look at the characteristics of the religion of conscience as Rousseau described it. In line with his attack on Christianity in *The Social Contract*, in his account of the religion of conscience, Rousseau rejects many of the central dogmas of Christianity, which render religion hierarchical and generate anxiety about salvation – including the doctrines of original sin, Crucifixion, grace, and prayer.<sup>103</sup> Affirming the religious doctrines also included in Rousseau's civil religion – the existence of God, the belief in

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<sup>102</sup> Arthur Melzer uses the term "religion of sincerity," while Jonathan Marks refers to it as "religion of conscience." Cf. Melzer, "The Origin of Counter-Enlightenment," and Marks, "The Divine Instinct?"

<sup>103</sup> Melzer, "The Origin of Counter-Enlightenment," 355.

afterlife, and so forth – the religion of conscience adds to these other theologically grounded principles such as the reality of free will and the element of conscience. Particularly the latter doctrine is crucial to this religion. Characterized as “the divine instinct,” operating as the inner source of morality, the voice of conscience is attributed the power to guide people, redirecting the attention of the pious towards their inner feelings and convictions.<sup>104</sup> It is, the argument goes, by reflecting into their hearts, people will realize that sincere belief and virtuous acts would bring salvation. So long as they maintain their faith and act morally, death is not something to be feared. Elevating individual conscience and free will to prominence, and professing an “ethical theology” (focused on the generation of moral practice) the religion of conscience thus aims to permeate, and shape, the innermost regions of the self, leading people towards virtuous living.<sup>105</sup>

However, while emphasizing the prevalence of individual conscience and subjectivity, the religion of conscience does not neglect the importance of citizenship duties either. On the contrary, it makes obedience to the laws and the maintenance of the public order crucial moral considerations for the faithful. This is especially important if there arises a conflict between individual convictions and the requirements of the state. In the event of such a conflict, the religion of conscience counsels absolute obedience to the commands of the state. The Savoyard Vicar argues:

While waiting for greater enlightenment, let us protect public order. In every country let us respect the laws, let us not disturb the worship they prescribe; let us

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Marks, “The Divine Instinct?”

<sup>105</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this “ethical theology” of the religion of conscience, see Melzer, “The Origin of Counter-Enlightenment,” 355-6.



not lead the citizens to disobedience. ...we are very certain that it is an evil thing to disobey laws.<sup>106</sup>

Uniting obedience to the laws and the performance of public duties with an individualized ethical-theology, the religion of conscience thus holds the potential to penetrate into the inner regions of the self, and thereby shape personalities while also contributing to the maintenance of the social contract and public order.

This capacity of the religion of conscience to mediate between the private and public duties makes this religion a necessary component of Rousseau's civil religion. Bridging the gap between public faith and individual subjectivities, the religion of conscience would help civil religion to reach the inner subjectivities of people, and trigger genuine influence. Moreover, its ethical theology provides a richer imaginative grounding for the dogmas of civil religion, rendering the force and appeal of these dogmas stronger and possibly more convincing. But most importantly, by making the goals of civil religion – the generation of patriotism, republican virtue, the maintenance of public order, and so forth – intimate personal values that have significant bearing on salvation and happiness, the religion of conscience provides civil religion with the capacity to capture people's imagination, and thus compel genuine allegiance. Thus, for Rousseau's civil religion to have the role it is designed to have, the religion of conscience, which involves an attempt to bring the individual and her inner subjectivity within the domain of sovereign control and influence, must be a part of it. At the end, then, the success of Rousseau's civil religion, and ultimately his political project, seems to depend upon its successful incorporation of this other and theologically grounded profession of faith – the religion of conscience.

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<sup>106</sup> Rousseau, *Emile*, 310.

Ultimately, this reading suggests that Rousseau's account of civil religion is not simply about a public profession of faith as he claims and as it is conventionally interpreted. While it may not be Christianity as it is traditionally understood, Rousseau's formulation of civil religion involves a deep engagement with the religion of conscience, grounded in an ethical theology and private conscience.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that sacrifice is an integral aspect of Rousseau's account of the social contract and the citizenship practices it entails. This makes the generation of the moral characteristics and affective dispositions enabling people to manage the sovereign demand for sacrifice a central concern for his political project. Aware that these strong dispositions cannot be generated solely through formal institutions and laws, Rousseau turns to the help of a civil religion, which would command absolute devotion to the state, while avoiding the dangers associated with Christianity – division of loyalties, asceticism, universalism, and so forth. But Rousseau's initial account of civil religion presented in the last chapter of *The Social Contract* would actually be unable to animate people in the ways he envisions. This is because this purely public religion a) lacks the kind of theological richness and emotional baring that can capture peoples' imagination and thereby provoke strong passions, and b) is unconcerned with the determination of people's inner subjectivities and personality. I have thus suggested taking Rousseau's religion of conscience theorized in *Emile* as the necessary basis of his theory of civil religion. With its ethical theology and emphasis on conscience, which provides a more solid and deeper grounding for the goals of civil religion, its focus

on the individual and her inner self, and its aspiration to form inner subjectivities, the religion of conscience has the capacity to mediate between the public demands of civil religion and individual subjectivities. As such, it is a necessary component of Rousseau's theorization of civil religion, envisioned to assist the political transformation of the individual into the patriotic and pious citizen.<sup>107</sup>

Several broader consequences follow from this reading of Rousseau's political thought. First, Rousseau's elaborate engagements with religion and the role it plays in political life has shown that he considered a purely secular politics to be insufficient to command genuine allegiance and mobilize people. At the hands of the sovereign, religion turns out to be vital for the founding and maintenance of political order, and a crucial source for generating obedience and sacrifice. His emphasis on the necessity of the political-theological further suggests that for Rousseau, who could be considered as one of the first theorists of modern nationalism, nationalism was not a strictly secular ideology that aimed to supersede and/or overcome religion. Contradicting the assumptions of the modernist accounts of nationalism that portray a stark dichotomy between pre-modern religious systems and secular nationalist projects – such as the works of Elie Kedourie and Ernest Gellner – Rousseau's work consistently emphasizes the necessary collaboration between religion and nationalism.

Finally, Rousseau's ambitious project to construct a new public religion to advance republican politics may avoid the pitfalls of Christianity, but also faces unique challenges concerning the determination of subjectivities and personal motivation. The

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<sup>107</sup> Thus, although Rousseau's thought aspires to overcome the secularist distinctions between private and public – and the kind of liberal politics building on them – and thereby create the unified individual dedicated to the republic, his civil religion indicates that a total evasion of these distinctions may ultimately be detrimental to his political project. For a focus on the underlying liberal assumptions of Rousseau's approach, see Beiner's *Civil Religion*.

necessary recourse to another religion, the religion of conscience, which includes an ethical theology and richer emotional bearing, to assist civil religion indicates that a purely public and thoroughly politicized profession of faith is likely to fail as an instrument of political regeneration. This suggests that nationalist projects that depend upon civil religions are led to integrate within the proposed civil religion other professions of faith, which involve a more solid grounding in an ethical theology and is thus capable of shaping individual sensibilities and imaginaries.

In the next chapter, I turn to the examination of an exemplary political attempt to create a civil religion to advance a particular form of republican politics. The context I will examine is not from within European modernity or the Judeo-Christian tradition, where scholars have typically applied the concepts we have thus far interrogated. Instead, I will look at the Turkish Republic, a self-consciously modern and secular attempt at constructing a new social contract and national ethos at the turn of the century. The examination of Turkish civil religion constructed by the founding father of that country, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, will help demonstrate not only the ambitious character of civil religion as a political project of founding a new nation, but also the influence of the Rousseauian legacy of accommodating theologically grounded professions of faith within civil religion.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Turkish Civil Religion and Islam: Generating Sacrifice for the Nation**

In an influential article entitled “Civil Religion in America” (1967), sociologist Robert Bellah made use of Rousseau’s concept of civil religion to describe the sacred grounds of American nationhood and religious dimensions of public life in that country.<sup>1</sup> Finding symbolic expression in America’s founding documents and presidential inaugurations, American civil religion includes institutionalized beliefs and rituals that help generate a distinct sense of American national purpose and pride. Following the publication of Bellah’s article, there has been a remarkable increase in the deployment of the theory of civil religion to examine the religiosity of political attachments and state practices in contemporary political societies. Focusing on institutionalized beliefs, symbols, and rituals characterizing national cultures, scholars have explored the multiplicity of ways civil religions help unify and mobilize people behind distinct purposes in diverse parts of the world.

Turkish secular nationalism constructed under the guidance of that country’s founding father, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, features as a remarkable example of a modern civil religion in these studies.<sup>2</sup> Envisioned as a crucial part of the secular modernization programme the emergent republic pursued, Turkish civil religion aimed to fulfill the political role and sociopolitical function Islam used to serve in the Ottoman Empire. Providing sanctity to republican institutions and norms, secular nationalism was thus

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96 (1967): 1-21.

<sup>2</sup> John A. Coleman, “Civil Religion,” *Sociological Analysis*, 31: 2 (1970): 67-77; Robert Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980)

intended to cultivate patriotic attachments amongst the population and generate support and enthusiasm for the new regime.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, my aim is to complicate this conventional account. In particular, I hope to show that the construction of civil religion in Turkey involved not only the imaginings of new national myths and patriotic rituals (to replace the previously dominant religious imaginings), but also, and more controversially, the Hobbesian strategy of re-structuring traditional religion itself so that it comes to support the modern secular state. This argument will be raised in several steps.

First, after a brief overview of the ideological grounds of secular modernization in Turkey and the reasons for its hostility towards Islam, I will proceed to examine the basic tenets of Turkish secular nationalism. Aiming to attach citizens' hearts and minds to the nation-state, the building of Turkish nationalism involved controversial historical and linguistic myths. Heavily influenced by Atatürk's thinking and contemporary eugenics and social Darwinism, these myths aimed to offer new ethnic/racial and linguistic bases for Turkish nationhood. In addition, new state rituals and cults were institutionalized. Amongst these, the cult of the republic and the cult of Atatürk were especially influential. Designed to provoke emotional attachments and devotion to the republic, these cults became the sacred institutions of the modern republic.

However, these nationalist cults proved insufficient to sustain a robust citizenship ethos in the new republic. This had partially to do with the elements of the new national imaginary. The historical and linguistic myths were too obscure and abstract, and failed to generate genuine conviction and enthusiasm amongst the populace. While the cults of the republic and Atatürk were more successful, they gradually led to a polarization within

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).

society, raising questions about the elitism of secular discourses. But the most important reason for the insufficiency of these secularist national myths alone to command complete allegiance and sacrifice was the social resilience of Islamic beliefs and attachments. Thus, in addition to these strategies conventionally associated with Rousseau's account of civil religion, Turkey was led to pursue the more controversial Hobbesian strategy examined in the first chapter of this dissertation. That is, the Turkish Republic undertook a systematic re-construction of Islam itself to render this religion compatible with Turkish nationalism, and thereby solidify and strengthen the affective grounds of the new civil religion.

Significantly, the resultant construct was a “Janus-faced” affair, involving not a complete rejection of traditional Islamic values and practices, but a selective accommodation and pragmatic reshaping of them.<sup>4</sup> In particular, Islamic traditions concerning obedience and sacrifice were integrated within the discourses and practices of civil religion, and were systematically promoted to inspire sacrificial citizenship dispositions. As the most transparent demonstration of this strategy, the chapter will examine Turkey's invocation of Islamic traditions of warfare and martyrdom in national school curriculum and universal conscription – the institution that is most readily associated with nationalist sacrifice and republican citizenship.

The chapter will conclude by highlighting two broad points. First, the development of Turkish civil religion through the combined pursuit of the cultivation of nationalism and new patriotic myths and the reconstruction of traditional religion provides an important illustration of the argument of the previous chapter concerning

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<sup>4</sup> Şerif Mardin, “Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2 (1971): 208.

Rousseau's account of civil religion. That is, civil religion is not simply a public profession of faith, but includes a sustained and deep engagement with theological imaginaries and ethics. Second, there are some important consequences to Turkey's incorporation of a particular version of Islam within its civil religion. I will thus a) emphasize the theoretical inconsistencies involved in Turkish civil religion's selective accommodation of Islamic values and doctrines, and b) point out that an unintended consequence of this accommodation is making available of new sites of contestation against secular sovereignty.

### **Ataturk and Nationalist Modernization**

The modern Turkish Republic was founded in 1923 following the victory of the nationalists in the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1922) waged against the Allied forces that occupied the lands of the defeated Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. As the head of the nationalist movement, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk became the first president of the new republic and remained in office until his death on 10 November 1938. Regarded as the founder of modern Turkey, Ataturk and his ideas have had immense influence in the shaping of Turkish nationalism. While the rise of Turkey's current government under the moderately Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) seems to have toned down the influence of Kemalist thinking in state practices and social life in Turkey, Ataturk's legacy is still protected both by the state and its ardent supporters in armed forces and civil society. Therefore, it is important to start the discussion with a brief overview of the intellectual grounds of Ataturk's thinking, and the nationalist modernization project he pioneered.



Ataturk began his political career with apparently little theoretical knowledge. As Şükrü Hanioglu has pointed out, he was not well versed in political theory (he sometimes confused Montesquieu with Rousseau in his speeches), but idealized the principles of the French Revolution, and had deep sympathy for republicanism.<sup>5</sup> From the books he read and his writings, we know that he admired Rousseau's argument that sovereignty is indivisible and inalienable, and that the only form of legitimate government is republican.<sup>6</sup> Ataturk was especially struck by this passage from Rousseau's *The Social Contract*: "I therefore give the name 'Republic' to every State that is governed by laws, no matter what the form of its administration may be: for only in such a case does the public interest govern, and the *res publica* rank as a *reality*. Every legitimate government is republican."<sup>7</sup> Fitting well with his own vision of republican governance in which a supreme leader would articulate and implement the will of the nation (for the well being of the nation), Rousseau's conception of sovereignty (at least as Ataturk interpreted it) helped shape the radical transformation Turkey underwent during the 1920s and 1930s.

A dualistic discourse characterized the nationalist modernization project. On the one hand, an ambitious agenda of Westernization directed at political institutions, social structure, and modes of conduct was pursued. On the other hand, the state launched a robust program of nationalization, emphasizing the glorious history and sublime characteristics of the Turkish nation. The ideal was to elevate the new country, impoverished by war and neglect, to the status of "civilized" industrial Western states, while simultaneously constructing a distinct Turkish identity and national pride to replace the traditional religious forms of identification dominant within the society. Through this

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<sup>5</sup> Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 109.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Recep Cengiz, ed., *Atatürk'un Okudugu Kitaplar*, Vol 7 (Ankara: Anitkabir Dernegi Yayinlari, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 110-1.

dualistic program, modernity and a spirit of national independence and patriotism would be synthesized.

Partially in response to the immense proportions of the task at hand, and partially because Atatürk could not tolerate opposition and rivalry, nationalizing reforms were implemented through highly authoritarian measures. First, a single party regime was established. The Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*- CHP) founded by Atatürk came to power in the first elections the republic held, and remained in power until 1950. The party was entirely under Atatürk's control. Although a new opposition party, the Progressive Republican Party was established in November 1924, it faced tremendous difficulties in opposing the policies of CHP and Atatürk, and was eventually banned in June 1925, under the pretext of security concerns raised by the outbreak of a Kurdish-Islamic uprising (Shayk Sait Rebellion) against the republican government.

In addition, the early republic did not shy away from using force when confronted with popular opposition of the latter kind against Atatürk's reforms. Indeed, in certain provinces like Dersim where the republican reforms and centralization policies faced significant challenges, the new regime justified even the use of military force (including the air force) in order to suppress resistance.<sup>8</sup> In this context, special courts exercising extraordinary powers were used to enable efficient response to those labeled as "rebels" and "traitors," thus contributing to the authoritarianism that marked the early republican modernizing initiative.

In short, what is conventionally considered as "the most radical secular revolution" ever achieved in the Muslim world was undertaken under authoritarian conditions

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

involving the establishment of a single party regime and elimination of rivalry and opposition, when necessary through the use of state violence.<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, the most controversial aspect of this secularizing “revolution” was its attack on Islam – the primary ideological pillar of the Ottoman regime that Turkey replaced. It seemed that the emergent republic sought to transform not only the existing religious grounds of sociopolitical institutions and norms, but to eliminate Islam from the public sphere altogether. But why were Ataturk and the nationalist modernizers so hostile towards Islam? Why did they consider this religion to be dangerous to the modern state that they wanted to create?

### **Islam and Civilization**

There were several reasons why Ataturk and the modernizing elite considered Islam in its traditional form to be dangerous for republican politics. As we shall see, some of the political problems they pointed out about Islam are closely related to issues that troubled Hobbes and Rousseau in their critique of Christianity. In the first instance, the modernizers thought that there were important doctrinal problems. Like most other monotheistic religions, Islam attributed ultimate sovereignty to God, and inspired people to dedicate themselves to the exaltation of God’s name and deeds. This led to a division of loyalties, and threatened the state’s ability to command complete allegiance and mobilize people. Moreover, there were no clear distinctions between the private and public realms in Islam. As a comprehensive worldview, this religion aimed to shape subjectivities and regulate public behavior. This interfered with the modern state’s goal to

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<sup>9</sup> George S. Harris, "Islam and the State in Modern Turkey," *Middle East Review* 11 (1979): 21-6.

re-shape the public realm according to secular laws and a nationalist ethos. The lack of a clear public/private divide could further generate conflicts between religious convictions and public obligations. A strong republic required people to confine their religious practices and the pursuit of salvation to the private realm, so that they could wholeheartedly perform their public obligations when called upon to do so.

In addition to these problems regarding sovereignty and obligation, some Islamic doctrines and practices conflicted with the new regime's understanding of modern civilization and the scientific worldview. Atatürk frequently raised this critique by relying upon the works of contemporary European Orientalists, and in particular, the Italian historian of Islam Leone Caetani. Adopting Caetani's views, he criticized Islam for facilitating "irrational" beliefs and behavior amongst the populace. From this perspective, a good example of such irrationalism was the widespread folk practices such as visiting the tombs of Muslim saints and seeking help from popular religious figures concerning medical, financial, and other personal problems.<sup>10</sup> Criticizing such "superstitious" approaches to deity and religion, Atatürk argued:

In the face of knowledge, science, and of the whole extent of radiant civilization, I cannot accept the presence in Turkey's civilized community of people primitive enough to seek material and spiritual benefits in the guidance of sheikhs. The Turkish republic cannot be a country of sheikhs, dervishes and disciples. The best, and the truest order is the order of civilization.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Markus Dressler, "The Religio-Secular Continuum: Reflections on the Religious Dimensions of Turkish Secularism," in *After Secular Law*, ed. Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, Robert A. Yelle, and Mateo Taussig-Rubbo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 221-41.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Mango, *Atatürk* (London: John Murray, 1999), 435.

In Ataturk's views, these practices of traditional Islam prevented the development of reason and modern attitudes amongst the uneducated masses ("kept them primitive"), and thus frustrated the new regime's modernization program.

Another point of concern was Islamic cultural codes and gender distinctions that clashed with modern notions of equality and the standards of Western civilization. Ataturk criticized Islamic notions of female purity and modesty, involving the covering of the face and eyes, and blamed Islam and Islamic cultural codes for the subordination of women.<sup>12</sup> But the dress codes for Muslim women were not the only problem. Ataturk thought Muslim men's attire to be below the standards of modern civilization as well. At one public speech in Anatolia, he mocked a traditionally dressed man present in the audience. Pointing at him, Ataturk argued:

He has a fez on his head, and a green turban wound around the fez, a traditional waistcoat on his back, and on top of it a jacket like mine. I can't see what's below. Now I ask you, would a civilized man wear such peculiar clothes and invite people's laughter.<sup>13</sup>

Such "backward" cultural codes and traditions associated with Islam had thus come to be seen as factors preventing the civilizational leap forward modern Turkey was intended to take.

Finally, Islam was considered incompatible with the republican project of generating a distinct Turkish nationhood. Following Caetani's views, Ataturk considered

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 434-5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 455.

Islam to be “an Arab faith and a vehicle for Arab domination.”<sup>14</sup> Before they converted to Islam, Turks were also a great people, however:

Arab religion...loosened the national ties of the Turkish nation, and benumbed national feelings and enthusiasm for the nation, because the aim of the religion established by Muhammad prompted an Arab nationalist policy...Those who accepted Muhammad’s religion had to suppress their identities.<sup>15</sup>

As an insidious tool of Arab imperialism, Islam in its current form could not reliably serve as the faith of the new Turkish nation, without endangering national independence and feeling.

Given these above-summarized incompatibilities between Islam and the modernizing agenda, the new republic was thus led to initiate a comprehensive process of secularizing reformation, aiming to significantly diminish, if not altogether eliminate, the influence of Islam in the institutions and public sphere of modern Turkey.

### **Ataturk’s Reforms and Secularization**

The first target of the secularizing reforms was the political system. Even before the proclamation of the republic in 1923, it was clear that the nationalist movement wanted to separate religious from political authority – a process that had already started

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<sup>14</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

in the late Ottoman period following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.<sup>16</sup> After the decisive victory of the nationalist forces in 1922, the Grand National Assembly separated the caliphate and the sultanate, and abolished the sultanate by claiming that it was “retroactively annulled from the time of the Allied occupation of Istanbul in March 1920.”<sup>17</sup> But the task of abolishing the caliphate, an institution of immense religious value and political significance required more time and preparation. Atatürk undertook this challenge only after ensuring the full support of the military forces. Declared incompatible with national sovereignty and the principles of republican government, the caliphate, along with the associated Ministry of Sharia Affairs and Pious Foundations, was finally abolished in 1924.

The abolition of the caliphate made clear that no religious institutions were to have any influence on the politics of the new republic. But this radical and at the time unpopular move was merely the beginning of the impending avalanche of reforms. Immediately after the abolition of the caliphate, the state set out to secularize the legal system. *Sharia* courts were abolished in 1924, and a new civil code modeled on the Swiss civil law of 1912 was introduced. This resulted in the outlawing of many traditional practices such as Islamic marriage and divorce, and polygamy, in addition to giving women equal rights with men. A new penal code based on the Italian penal law was

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<sup>16</sup> Hasan Kayali, “The Young Turks and the Committee of Union and Progress,” in *The Routledge Handbook on Modern Turkey*, ed. Metin Heper and Sabri Sayari (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), 27. Young Turk’s ousting of Sultan Abdulhamid in 1908 is conventionally identified as a revolution. But, we should be cautious in using this label with respect to this event. As Hanioglu, commented, the heroes of the revolution were in fact conservatives, “who viewed their essential task not as destruction and creative reconstruction, but rather as a conservation and survival.” They viewed themselves as the saviors of the empire, and wanted to restore the constitutional sultanate launched in 1876. Şükrü Hanioglu, “The Second Constitutional Period, 1908–1918,” *Cambridge History of Turkey, Volume 4*, ed. Resat Kasaba (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). 63-67.

<sup>17</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 140.

adopted in 1926. All religious references used in oath of office or at courts were eliminated in 1928. By 1930, “the entire legal system had been stripped of any religious references,” and in 1937 the French principle of *laïcité*<sup>18</sup> was “enshrined in the constitution as a central tenet of the Turkish Republic.”<sup>19</sup>

Alongside the secularization of legislation, the state replaced existing social codes and mores associated with Islam with their equivalents adopted from Europe, and thus associated with Christian culture. In 1925, the Gregorian calendar was adopted, and the use of the Islamic calendar was abandoned. In 1926, the Hat law was passed and the wearing of the Ottoman/Islamic fez was outlawed. The veiling of women, on the other hand, was not altogether banned but officially discouraged. Under civil service regulations, the government banned only the donning of headscarves in official premises including schools. Elsewhere the headscarves were tolerated.<sup>20</sup> The wearing of religious attire hereby came to be restricted to Islamic officials authorized by the government. In 1925, all dervish lodges, shrines, and mausoleum, “including the tombs of sultans were closed, and their staff dismissed.”<sup>21</sup> In 1928, a modified Latin alphabet was introduced and the use of Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman scripts was abandoned. In 1935, the weekly holiday was changed from Islamic day of observance, Friday, to the Christian day of rest, Sunday.

In sum, borrowing Şerif Mardin’s descriptions, while the 'little man's' religion was tolerated (so long as it did not interfere with the nationalist interests), in around a decade

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<sup>18</sup> Often translated as secularism, *laïcité* connotes a stricter endorsement of the institutional elimination of religious from the public sphere. As the outcome of French Republic’s struggle to gain independence from the Catholic Church that could be traced back to the Revolution, *laïcité* was finally institutionalized in France by the disestablishment of the Church in 1905. The Turkish rendering of the term is *laiklik*.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>20</sup> Mango, *Ataturk*, 434-5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 437.



the Turkish republic brought to an end the institutional prominence and overpowering public presence Islam enjoyed during the Ottoman era.<sup>22</sup>

But this robust attack at Islam created a new kind of “legitimacy vacuum” at the center of the republican regime.<sup>23</sup> After all, until very recently, Islam had been the most important ground of identity formation in the society, and served important political functions in unifying and mobilizing the people. In fact, it was precisely this unifying and mobilizing potential of Islam that was skillfully utilized by the nationalist movement itself during the Turkish War of Independence. As many have shown, the leaders of the resistance including Mustafa Kemal himself appealed to people’s religious sensibilities to convince them to take arms against the invading forces.<sup>24</sup> So, by attacking this important traditional ground of mobilization and obligation, the republic exposed itself to possible difficulties concerning the generation of popular allegiance and enthusiasm.

To resolve such potential problems, the modern Turkish Republic undertook the construction of a new civil religion – a new national faith designed to enable the state to generate the affective resources necessary for the performance of difficult citizenship obligations such as military sacrifice. The construction of the Turkish civil religion involved the combined pursuit of patriotic myth-making and the reconstruction of traditional religion. First, consistent with Rousseau’s emphasis on the generation of a patriotic national culture, the new regime constructed a distinct formulation of Turkish

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<sup>22</sup> Mardin, “Ideology and Revolution,” 209.

<sup>23</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 160.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London, GBR, New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 402. Şerif Mardin notes, for example, especially against the Greek-led invasion on the Western front, nationalists “capitalized on rural Muslims’ feelings of revulsion against the Greeks.” Şerif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 233.

nationalism, involving a series of new rituals and cults, heavily influence by Ataturk's thinking.

However, these cults and rituals, on their own, were not sufficient to create the robust citizenship ethos the republic envisioned. In particular, it quickly became clear that, despite the radicalism of the secularizing reforms, Islam continued to operate as a potent source of influence and mobilization within the society, especially in rural areas of the country, and thus challenged the secular republic's claim to complete sovereignty. Thus, in addition to these nationalist cults and rituals, Turkey was required to pursue perhaps the more controversial Hobbesian strategy examined in the first chapter of the dissertation. That is, the state attempted to reconstruct Islam itself so that it becomes compatible with the secular system and helps advance the goals of Turkish civil religion. I will discuss each of these strategies in detail below.

### **The Construction of Modern Turkish Nationalism**

Through a series of complex and controversial practices, the new republic propagated a distinct form of secular nationalism (sometimes referred to as Kemalism after Ataturk's middle name), and, to borrow Benedict Anderson's famous phrase, a new way of "imagining" the Turkish nation.<sup>25</sup> First, in accordance with the goal of providing a secular grounding for Turkish national identity, the state formulated and disseminated new theories of history and language. The initiative started in 1930 with Ataturk's commissioning of Turkish Hearths (Turk Ocaklari) Committee for the Study of Turkish History to prepare a comprehensive historical genealogy. As Soner Çağaptay notes, the members of the Committee included prominent historians, intellectuals, and ideologues

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<sup>25</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, New York: Verso, 1983).

of the new regime including Atatürk's adopted daughter Afet Inan.<sup>26</sup> The research resulted in a 606 pages book entitled *Main Themes of Turkish History*. In 1931, the Committee was renamed as the Society for the Study of Turkish History, and formulated the Turkish History Thesis. Introduced in the First Turkish History Congress convened in 1932, the Thesis was then disseminated to the public through an elaborate pedagogical campaign involving schools, newspapers, and academic publications as well as the propaganda machine of the ruling party, CHP.

The Thesis consisted of a ludicrous attempt to portray the Turkish nation as “the ancestor of brachycephalic peoples.”<sup>27</sup> Notoriously, the premises of this historical theory were heavily influenced by contemporary race theory, social Darwinism, and eugenics.<sup>28</sup> According to this thesis:

The cradle of human civilization was Central Asia, the original Turkish homeland, from where the Turks had migrated to all Old World continents, establishing major states, such as the Sumerian and Hittites empires, and helping “backward” human groups such as the Chinese and Indians to produce impressive civilizations. Similarly the Turks could take substantial credit for the achievements of Greco-Roman civilization, which was the product of Turkish peoples who had migrated to Crete and Italy. ...Had there been no Turkish migration, the other religions of the world might long have continued to live in primitive conditions. In other

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<sup>26</sup> Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* (London, GBR: Routledge, 2006), 148-9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>28</sup> For an analysis of the influence of eugenics and social Darwinism in Turkish modernization, see Ayça Alemdaroğlu, “Politics of the body and eugenic discourse in early republican Turkey,” *Body & Society* 11 (2005): 61–76.

words, the twentieth century Turk in Anatolia was the descendent of the race that first gave humankind fire, bread, clothing, tools, and domesticated animals.<sup>29</sup> This “invented” history had the advantage of turning the recent Ottoman-Islamic history into “a modest footnote to a long, glorious past.”<sup>30</sup> Through this portrayal, the modern republic attempted to suppress the power of the recent Islamic past within national memory and imagination. In addition, the proposed historical myth strengthened Turkey’s claim to Anatolia, against competing nations such as the Greek. “Since the Turks were its original autochthonous inhabitants,” Anatolia could be considered a natural Turkish homeland.<sup>31</sup>

Importantly, the Thesis also suggested that racial character was crucial to Turkish nationhood. Its promoters claimed that Turkish people do not belong to the “yellow race,” but the Turk, “who is tall, has a long white face, a straight or arched thin nose, proportioned lips, often blue eyes, horizontal, and not slanted eye lids,” was “one of the most beautiful examples of the white race.”<sup>32</sup> Bearing the mark of contemporary European racial theories, especially that of the Swiss anthropologist Eugene Pittard (who later became the mentor of Afet Inan), the Thesis hereby demonstrated the new regime’s endeavor to transform race and racial pride into a significant element in the formation of national identity, attempting thereby to sideline the prominence of religion in popular self-identification.

The claims of the Turkish History Thesis were further strengthened by the Turkish Language Thesis. Also known as the Sun Language Theory, the Turkish

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<sup>29</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 164-5.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 164-6.

<sup>31</sup> Çağaptay, *Islam*, 51.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 51.

Language Thesis was the product of research conducted by the Society for Examining the Turkish Language (renamed Turkish Language Association in 1936), founded by Atatürk in 1932. Announced in the First Turkish Language Congress convened in Istanbul, the Language Thesis claimed, similar to the History Thesis, that all Indo-European and Semitic languages were derived from proto-Turkish spoken in the original homeland of the Turks, the Central Asia. However, it was argued that the original purity and richness of Turkish had been corrupted under foreign influence, in particular Arabic and Farsi. The goal of the modern republic was to reverse this process of decline, and provoke a form of nationalist-linguistic renaissance whereby “the genuine beauty and richness of the Turkish language” would be revealed, and Turkish would be “elevated to the high rank it deserves among world languages.”<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, an ambitious campaign of linguistic purification was launched by the Ministry of Education. All the Arabic and Persian words commonly used in spoken dialect were replaced with pure Turkish words. When there was no equivalent, new words were coined to replace the foreign words. Altogether, around 1400 new words were publicized by the Society for Examining the Turkish Language.<sup>34</sup> The Society also began to publish a new journal, *Tarama Dergisi*, systematically introducing the newly fabricated words. In addition, especially in regions highly populated with Arabic and Greek speaking communities, political campaigns urging citizens to speak Turkish (“Citizen, Speak Turkish) were pursued.<sup>35</sup> Proposing a relatively inclusive form of nationalization – at least, in theory – through linguistic conformity, the attempt aimed at assimilating non-Turkish speaking population that found themselves as the citizens of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 57-8.

Turkish Republic at the end of the war. As Çağaptay details, this state-orchestrated movement to purify language was strongest during 1934 and 1935, and in the words of Geoffrey Lewis, resulted in a “catastrophic success.” It produced an almost totally new language, which rendered subsequent generations virtually incapable of understanding anything published prior to the [linguistic] reform – including the entirety of Ottoman literature and historiography.”<sup>36</sup> The idea was that once people’s affective ties to the recent past and knowledge were cut in this way, the republic could freely disseminate the re-invented national history without significant opposition.

In sum, the Turkish History and Turkish Language Thesis were designed to operate as the joint pillars of the secular national identity the republic aimed to generate. Offering new racial/ethnic and linguistic grounds for Turkish nationhood, these theories were intended to transform the religious basis of subject formation, while also positing new myths to generate national pride and confidence. Gradually, the historically unfounded and racially controversial elements of the Theses were abandoned, and Ottoman history has come to be integrated (in a controlled way) within the official historical narrative of the glorious achievements of the Turkish people. But, other elements and attending assumptions of these twin Theses remained strong within discourses of (especially right-wing) Turkish nationalism.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to these new theories of history and language, new nationalist cults and rituals were invented and proved to be far more effective than the above-summarized Theses. Two cults were particularly important: a) the cult of the state/the republic and b) the personality cult around the figure of Atatürk. First, consistent with the strategies

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<sup>36</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 180.

<sup>37</sup> Tanil Bora, “Nationalist Discourses in Turkey”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102 (2003): 433-451.

Rousseau described in the *Government of Poland*, Turkey established a cult of the republic. New civic rituals were introduced to promote passionate identification with the state and its institutions. For example, it was made mandatory for primary school children to start the school day by gathering in the garden and chanting together a “student pledge” (*Andımız*). In this pledge, the students – regardless of their ethnic origin – reaffirm their Turkish identity and promise to sacrifice their lives as “gifts” to the Turkish state. In addition, all school children participate in the mandatory chanting of the national anthems at least once a week in the school garden. As Fethi Acikel notes, these rituals discipline forming consciences and intend to generate obedience to the state at a very early age, while also emphasizing the value of nationalist sacrifice.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, a series of ceremonial activities and public festivals celebrating the military and political landmarks in the founding of the republic were institutionalized. The day Atatürk arrived in the Anatolian port town Samsun, which is regarded as the beginning of the national liberation struggle, was made 19 May the Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day. On this day, Turkish youth gather together in the nation’s stadiums, and demonstrate the strength and vigor of the Turkish people through athletic and artistic displays. These celebrations are intended to reaffirm the nation’s unerring dedication to preserve the republic, and thus prove Turkish youth’s worthiness of this sacred duty, entrusted to them by Atatürk. The victory of the nationalist forces against the Allies is similarly celebrated as the 30 August Victory day.

Political landmarks are also commemorated. The proclamation of the republic is celebrated as 29 November Republic Day while the opening of the Grand National Assembly

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<sup>38</sup> Fethi Açıkel, “Devletin Manevi Sahsiyeti ve Ulusun Pedagojisi,” in *Milliyetçilik*, ed Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 117-40.

is commemorated as 23 April National Sovereignty and Children's Festival. As Rousseau emphasizes in his advise to the Poles in *The Government of Poland*, participation in these public celebrations and festivities (which is mandatory for all school children) is intended to generate a deep love for the nation and the republic, and thereby cultivate the affective dispositions required for republican citizenship.

Citizenship education classes also contributed to the sacralization of the state and its institutions. Consistent with Rousseau's vision, Atatürk attributed immense significance to the pedagogical institutions in the idealization of the republic and the generation of a patriotic national ethos. To accomplish this goal, he himself penned a large collection of school textbooks entitled *Vatandaş için Medeni Bilgiler* (Civilized Knowledge for the Citizen), which were published under Afet Inan's name in 1930.<sup>39</sup> As Füsün Üstel has shown, these books intend to cultivate the moral characteristics that would enable citizens to perform their obligations to the state with courage and enthusiasm. In this vein, the students are taught to envision themselves as the dependent parts of a larger political family (the nation), whose security and maintenance precede their own.<sup>40</sup> If need be, they must be ready to forfeit their lives for the survival and honor of the nation, and its protector, the state.<sup>41</sup> The books thus emphasize the value of nationalist sacrifice, and idealize military

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<sup>39</sup> Covering essential themes including the structures of government, nationalism, citizenship, military service and so forth, these textbooks provide valuable insights into the political imaginary of the ruling elite. While the collection appeared as the work of Atatürk's adopted daughter, Afet Inan, it was widely known that he co-authored these books. As Altınay shows, in the 1964 edition of the collection, Afet Inan admitted that the collection was co-authored by Mustafa Kemal: "I see it as my responsibility to set the historical record straight. Although these books came under my name, they have been written based on Atatürk's ideas and criticisms and the narrative style belongs solely to him." Quoted in Altınay, *The Myth*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Füsün Üstel, "Cumhuriyet'ten Bu Yana Yurttaş Profili," *Yeni Yüzyıl*, April 24, 1996; "Yurttaşlık Bilgisi Kitapları ve Yurttaş Profili", *Yeni Yüzyıl*, April 25, 1996, *"Makbul Vatandaş"ın Peşinde* (İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> It should be added that the attempt to regulate the private realm and individual subjectivities is an integral aspect of this pedagogical effort. Students are given instructions on even the minutest details concerning how to manage their selves and private lives, including personal hygiene, health, entertainment, and re-creational activities. The ultimate goal is to render individual subjectivities and worldviews



duties. For instance, in a secondary education textbook entitled *Askerlik Vazifesi* (Military Service), military service is portrayed as the most sacred duty and students are encouraged to identify themselves as the soldiers of the proud republic if they are male, and as the proud mothers of future soldiers if they are female.<sup>42</sup> In sum, just as in Rousseau's Spartan utopia, Turkish citizenship education aimed to transform the classroom into an arena for the cultivation of patriotic attachments to the republic and martial heroism.

The other substantial cult of Turkish nationalism is the personality cult around the founder of the nation, Atatürk. As Esra Özyürek has pointed out, the seeds of this cult were sown as early as in 1927, when Atatürk himself, "defined his role as a charismatic and authoritarian leader of the new regime and nation in his famous marathon speech called *Nutuk* (The Speech), delivered in 36 hours over six days to the National Assembly."<sup>43</sup> Claiming sole credit for the nationalist victory, Atatürk intended *Nutuk* to inform subsequent history writing. Based on this narration, "early representations of the leader depict him as the sole victor of the Greco- Turkish War and as the creator of a new nation," thus located "at a higher position than all of the sultans of the Ottoman Empire he had replaced."<sup>44</sup> The bestowing upon him the honorary surname, Atatürk – meaning the Father Turk or Ancestor Turk – by the Grand Nation Assembly in 1934 further

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compatible with the robust citizenship ideal endorsed by the regime, and ensure compliance with it. Noted also in Ayşe Kadioglu's "Citizenship and Individuation in Turkey: The triumph of Will over Reason," *L'individu en Turquie et en Iran* 26 (1998), accessed March 28, 2013, <http://cemoti.revues.org/34>.

<sup>42</sup> In effect, to further promote martial virtues, the early republic also introduced military education classes in the secondary school system. These classes were later discontinued, but it was made mandatory for all students to take a national security class administered by a military officer. Cf. Suavi Aydın, "The Militarization of Society: Conscription and National Armies in the Process of Citizen Creation," in *Conscientious Objection: Resisting Militarized Society*, ed. Özgür Heval Çınar and Coşkun Üsterci (New York: Zed Books, 2009), 23.

<sup>43</sup> Esra Özyürek, "Miniaturizing Atatürk: Privatization of State Imagery and Ideology in Turkey," *American Ethnologist*, 31: 3 (2004): 377.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 477.

demonstrated his exalted status in the national imagination. But, it was after the death of the man himself that his cult reached immense proportions, gaining crucial significance as the “immortal symbol of the nation.”<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the most striking manifestations of the cult of Atatürk are visual depictions/representations of the leader. During his presidency, Atatürk was constantly accompanied by personal photographers who created a rich collection of choreographed pictures of him. In these pictures, he often appears in “Western clothes and accessories, which included tuxedos, golf pants, capes, and walking sticks, and engaged in modern social activities such as dancing the waltz, drinking alcohol, and socializing with women.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Turkish artists produced paintings of the leader, depicting him as a statesman, general, teacher, and the supreme leader of the nation. Distributed widely, these paintings and pictures of Atatürk have gradually come to occupy virtually the entirety of the public space and (often) private homes throughout the country.

Another indispensable element of the cult is Atatürk’s statues. Famous European sculptors such as Henrich Kripll and Peter Canonica were invited to Turkey by Atatürk himself to make statues of Atatürk. As Hanioglu notes, “the first statue of Atatürk was erected in 1926 in Sarayburnu, just outside the garden of Topkapi Palace, depicting him looking toward Anatolia while turning his back on the former imperial palace.”<sup>47</sup> After his death, his statues and busts appeared in every school, public office, park, and square all around the country. As in his paintings and pictures, his statues and busts depict him in various roles – as the hero of the national independence war, as a great legislator, as a Western-looking statesman, and so forth. Captured and immortalized in imagery and art

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>47</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 185.

form, Turkey's founding father has thus become a permanent presence in Turkey's public sphere. With his intense gaze directed at his children (the nation) from the walls, squares, gardens, and streets of Turkey, it is as if he continues to keep them constantly under his spell and surveillance, even after his death in 1938.

In addition to visual imagery, Atatürk's wit and wisdom permeate the public sphere in Turkey. His comments and messages concerning a wide array of topics – health, morality, work ethic, sports, diet, science, and so forth – are printed on the walls or hung as placards in public offices, stadiums, classrooms, hospitals, and streets.<sup>48</sup> Through these comments, he symbolically continues to offer his eternal wisdom and guidance to the nation, thus strengthening his sacred status as the immortal leader of the nation.

The cult of Atatürk has its own shrines and holy sites, too. The houses he lived are treated as sacred spaces while the objects he used have acquired the status of "sacred relics."<sup>49</sup> But the ultimate shrine of this cult is Atatürk's mausoleum, *Anıtkabir*. A colossal example of neoclassical architecture (probably imitating the Acropolis), the mausoleum was built over the course of fifteen years and was opened for visitations in 1953. Tens of thousands people visit the mausoleum annually. These visits follow a ritualistic protocol: "people would have to descend from their vehicles and walk toward the monument in utter silence and respect."<sup>50</sup> As Yael Navaro-Yashin has pointed out, since the early 1990s – a period of high tension between Islamists and secularists in Turkey leading to the military intervention of 1997 –, the visitations to *Anıtkabir* have turned into symbolic performances of loyalty to the secular republic. Secularists from all sectors of life – university professors, doctors, teachers, political parties, lawyers – began

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>50</sup> Yael Navaro Yashin, *Faces of the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 191-2.

to organize ritualistic walks to *Anıtkabir* with written complaints concerning social and political ills. Soliciting his help and guidance as if he were alive, people expect Atatürk to deliver, as it were, his magic spell and resolve his children's problems.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the religiosity and intense devotion demonstrated by these public performances led critics to liken these ritualistic visitations to Atatürk's mausoleum to saint tomb visitations, which (as we have seen) were condemned as irrational and superstitious in the early republican era.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 192.



Illustration 1: Ataturk's mausoleum (Anıtkabir)

Sometimes, the religiosity surrounding the figure of Atatürk is more fantastically demonstrated. A famous example is the popular fascination caused by a reported “apparition” of the leader in a remote village in the eastern town of Ardahan in 1994. On October 30, newspapers reported that Atatürk’s silhouette appeared on a hill across this village when a cloud cast down its shadow.<sup>1</sup> Interpreted as a sign from Atatürk and the proof of his continuing surveillance over the republic, the event led the local authorities to organize a festival on the spot in 1997, which drew large crowds from all over the country to witness this “miracle.” Enhancing the sacred aura around Atatürk, such mystical attributes demonstrate the emotional intensity of this leadership cult in Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 193.



Illustration 2: Ataturk's silhouette in the eastern town of Ardahan.

In short, emphasizing the greatness and immortality of the republic and its founder, the cults of Turkish nationalism sanctified the new regime and its institutions, and offered secular myths and fantasies to ground Turkish nationhood, and energize popular sentiments. Aiming to replace the emotional bearing Islam had in sociopolitical imaginary in this way, they thus contributed to the broader project of generating nationalist loyalty and devotion to the republic.

### **The Remaking of Islam**

However, secular nationalism (as it was cultivated in this early republican era) was on its own still insufficient to generate the passions that are necessary to inspire people to perform difficult citizenship obligations such as sacrifice. This had partially to do with the elements of the new nationalism. As has been shown, the historical myths fabricated to provoke national pride and passion (such as the Turkish History and Language Theses), were too obscure and unconvincing. The complicated historical and anthropological arguments through which these myths were justified and disseminated were often not accessible to the majority of the population. Unable to penetrate the masses, they thus failed to mobilize and energize the people. Although the cult of the state and Atatürk were more effective and succeeded in capturing people's imagination to a large extent, they also had disadvantages. In particular, after Atatürk's death, these cults began to be deployed in partisan ways that gradually led to the perception that secular nationalism is an elite discourse, disrespectful of religion.<sup>1</sup> This perception grew stronger after the transition to multiparty democracy in 1950. Islam-friendly parties began to

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<sup>1</sup> For a focus on this point, see, amongst others, Nilüfer Göle, *Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), and Cihan Tuğal, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009).



(re)emerge and challenge the hegemony of secular discourses. The Turkish military's harsh response to any criticism and the four interventions it undertook under the pretext of defending secularism strengthened this negative perception.<sup>2</sup> As such, secular Turkish nationalism's ability to unify and animate all segments of the population was hindered.

But the most important reason for the insufficiency of secular Turkish nationalism alone to command complete allegiance and operate as an affective basis of strong citizenship was the social resilience of Islamic attachments and passions. While Atatürk's reforms changed the institutional structure and secularized public discourse, from the beginning of the modernization process, it was apparent that Islam continued to operate as an important source of identity formation and influence, especially in rural Turkey.<sup>3</sup> Aware of this social reality, the modernizing regime thus pursued an additional strategy to bring about the nationalist transformation it envisioned. This was the Hobbesian method of undertaking a thorough reconstruction of religion and religious sensibilities so that they become compatible with secular politics – and thereby strengthen the affective grounds of the new civil religion.

Consistent with Hobbes's insight, Turkey first brought religion under complete state control. The institutional locus of this control was (and continues to be) a new state institution established the very same day that the caliphate was abolished, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı).<sup>4</sup> The Diyanet became responsible for overseeing "all cases concerning the Exalted Islamic Faith which relate to beliefs

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Şerif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics," *Daedalus* 102 (1973): 169-190 and "Religion in Modern Turkey," *International Social Journal* 29 (1977): 229-254.

<sup>4</sup> Thenceforth referred to as Diyanet.

(*itikadat*) and rituals of worship (*ibadat*)” in addition to training religious personnel.<sup>5</sup> With the outlawing of other institutions of religious learning and guidance – *madrashas* were closed down in 1924, and *tarikas* and dervish lodges in 1925 – the Diyanet became the sole authority for the production and dissemination of religious discourse and knowledge. For instance, in addition to regulating religious education, it began to prepare the *khutbas* (sermons) delivered all around the country at Friday prayers while also releasing frequent comments on current issues through popular journals, newspapers, and (today) social media.

Moreover, consistent with the overall emphasis on “Turkification,” Turkish translations of the Qu’ran, along with a 9-volume commentary on it, and a compilation of *hadiths* – sayings of the Prophet Muhammad – were commissioned.<sup>6</sup> In addition to offering an interpretation of doctrine favorable to secular politics, the goal was to prevent people from seeking the assistance of unauthorized religious figures by making religious texts (and their interpretations) available in vernacular language. More controversially, the state attempted to switch to Turkish in ritual observance. New laws were passed to make the use of Turkish mandatory in three stages of ritual prayer: “the call to prayer (*adhan*), the invitation to prayer at the mosque (*qad qamat al-salat*), and the recitation of the phrase “God is Great (*Allahu Akbar*).”<sup>7</sup> Although this latter measure was eventually abandoned due to popular opposition, it demonstrated the significance the state initially attributed to the linguistic dimensions of religious reformation.

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Davison, “Turkey, a “Secular” State? The Challenge of Description,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102 (2003): 333-350.

<sup>6</sup> Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, 154.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

But what exactly does the content of this reconstructed version of Islam look like? In the first instance, the new religion involved a simplified theology, emphasizing the sufficiency of the five pillars of Islam for leading a faithful life: testifying to God's oneness, prayer, paying an alms tax for the needy, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. In addition, the "rational" character of Islam was stressed. Turkish Muslims were instructed to pursue science and learning, and adjust to the modern age. In this context, religious interpretations and practices conflicting with the image of enlightened religiosity the state endorsed – such as shrine visitations, consultations with sheikhs, veiling of women's face, and so forth – were portrayed as superstitious and reactionary.<sup>8</sup> Further, the necessity to distinguish individual belief from public obligations was emphasized. While private sphere was identified as the primary arena for carrying out the requirements of faith, as citizens, Muslims were taught to dutifully follow the laws and protect the public order, even when this may on occasion appear to conflict with their individual convictions.

But the most significant characteristic of this reconstructed religion was its sanctification of the Turkish republic and nationalist values and services. On the one hand, and consistent with the modernizers' distrust of the non-national character of traditional Islam ("Arab religion"), the Turkish nation's contributions to Islamic religious development and excellence was made the central component of religious teaching.<sup>9</sup> In this vein, the new religious discourse idealized the "truth" (and superiority) of the modern

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Markus Dressler, "Public/Private Distinctions, the Alevi Question, and the Headscarf: Turkish Secularism Revisited," *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age*, ed. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, and Linell Cady (New York: Palgrave, 2010) 121-42; Christopher Dole, *Healing Secular Life: Loss and Devotion in Modern Turkey* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012)

<sup>9</sup> Richard Tapper and Nancy Tapper, "Religion, Education and Continuity in a Provincial Town," and Ayse Saktanber, "Muslim Identity in Children's Picture-Books," in *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State*, ed. Richard Tapper (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 1991).

Turkish Islam. On the other hand, however, Islamic traditions themselves were re-interpreted to render this religion compatible with nationalist ideology. In pursuing this goal, the Turkish state adopted a contingent approach towards Islamic traditions and values available in the social structure, involving not a simple rejection and suppression, but selective appropriation and accommodation. More specifically, while Islamic traditions that are detrimental to state interests were suppressed, beliefs and practices considered to be beneficial to nationalism were incorporated within the new religious discourses and practices – leading scholars like Mardin to characterize the resultant construct a “Janus faced affair,” laden with theoretically inconsistent but politically efficient elements.<sup>10</sup>

For instance, the state downplayed Islamic discourses of *umma* – the supranational community of faith – while capitalizing on the idea of the Muslim *millet* (referring to confessional communities within the Ottoman Empire). In fact, and in apparent contrast to the regime’s above described attempt to provide an ethnic/racial and linguistic basis for the new Turkish identity, the notion of the Muslim *millet* was deployed to unify the population and strengthen nationalist feeling.<sup>11</sup>

But the most significant instance of this accommodation of Islamic traditions by the republican regime concerned issues of sacrifice. In order to cultivate patriotic and sacrificial citizenship dispositions and thus strengthen Turkish nationalism, Turkey systematically incorporated Islamic notions of warfare and martyrdom within the discourses of the new civil religion. I will examine the characteristics and consequences

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<sup>10</sup> Mardin, “Ideology and Revolution,” 208. See also Christopher Dole, *Healing Secular Life*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Şener Aktürk, “Persistence of the Islamic Millet as an Ottoman Legacy: Mono-Religious and Anti-Ethnic Definition of Turkish Nationhood,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 45:6 (2009): 893-909; Selim Deringil, “The Ottoman Origins of Turkish Nationalism, Namık Kemal to Mustafa Kemal,” *European History Quarterly* 23 (1993): 165-191.

of this accommodation in detail below by focusing on universal conscription, an institution most readily identified with republican citizenship – and regulated by the most ardent defender of the secular regime in Turkey, the Turkish military.

### **Universal Conscription and Religion**

Turkey established universal conscription as a constitutional right and duty of citizenship in 1927. In Atatürk's words, the institution was envisioned to operate as "the grand national school of discipline —a grand school that would also educate staff that would be most useful in our economic, cultural, and social wars."<sup>12</sup> Consistent with this view, conscription has been deployed as a pedagogical tool to transform the young men of the nation into model citizens.<sup>13</sup> During the time they spend in the barracks, conscripts are inculcated with basic knowledge about modern governmental institutions, social formations, and economic structure, as well as essential skills and technologies required to successfully operate within them. The acquisition of these new skills and technologies are also intended to prepare them to become educators themselves.<sup>14</sup> When they reenter civil society, they are expected to disseminate what they have been taught to other citizens, especially women, who are not conscripted. In this way, universal conscription helps engineer a disciplined citizenry, cooperating with the secular regime and reproducing its governing principles.

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Sinem Gürbey, "Islam, Nation-State, and the Military: A Discussion of Secularism in Turkey," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29:3 (2009): 377.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Daniel Lerner and Richard D. Robinson, "Swords and Ploughshares: The Turkish Army as a Modernizing Force," *World Politics* 13: 1 (1960): 19-44, Serdar Şen, *Silahlı Kuvvetler ve Modernizm* (Istanbul, Turkey: Sarmal Yayınevi, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Altınay, *The Myth*; Emma Sinclair-Webb, "'Our Bülent is now a Commando': Military Service and Manhood in Turkey," in *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Mai Ghoussoub and Emma Sinclair-Webb (London: Saqi, 2000), 65-92.

While this socio-political modernization pursued through conscription in Turkey has been frequently studied, the use of Islam in military training received scant attention. But, in addition to modern knowledges, Turkey trains conscripted civilians in the above-described version of nationalist Islam. Consider the content of the textbook used in the religious education of conscripted civilians, which is entitled *Askere Din Kitabı – The Book on Religion for the Soldier*. Originally prepared in 1925 upon the request of the Chief of General Staff Fevzi Çakmak – a close companion of Atatürk – the book was penned by then President of Diyanet, Ahmed Hamdi Akseki, and has since then seen seven editions, the last being in 2002.<sup>15</sup> The primary aim of the book is to create a pious and obedient national defense force through the teaching of the reconstructed religion. To accomplish this goal, it brings together narratives from the ancient “imaginary” roots of the Turkish people in central Asia (consistent with the History Thesis), with early Islamic and the Ottoman period.

Several recurrent themes invoked in the book helps demonstrate the ways in which religion is put to the service of modern Turkish nationalism. First, the book praises Turkish people’s allegedly invincible military ethos and links this to the strength and purity of their faith (*iman*). Addressed as “God’s sword,” conscripts are invited to cherish this legacy, and perform their military duties with religious zeal.<sup>16</sup> This characterization is further reinforced by a surprising move in the codification of conscription not only as an obligation of citizenship – a way of “paying your blood and life-tax” to the state – but also a part of the Islamic requirement of jihad.<sup>17</sup> Given the theoretical inappropriateness

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<sup>15</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Akseki, *Askere Din Kitabı*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Istanbul, Turkey: Diyanet İşleri Yayınları, 1977). All the translations from this book are mine.

<sup>16</sup> Akseki, *Askere*, 222.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

of invoking the Islamic notion of jihad with respect to military service in the republican army, this invocation lacks any theological elaboration or depth, however. In fact, consistent with the reformed religion's attempt to simplify religion, theological insight and theoretical elaboration of complicated religious concepts is deliberately avoided throughout the book. Importantly, this approach also renders the book accessible to all segments of the population, including the uneducated. Thus, rather than engaging in doctrinal complexities – such as competing interpretations and historical applications of the concept of jihad –, the book simply makes rhetorical and cursory uses of such religious concepts in order to enhance the obligatory character of a nationalist citizenship duty.<sup>18</sup>

Another important goal of this rhetorical appeal is to prevent military disobedience and desertion. The conscripts are repeatedly taught that they will violate Islamic laws if they refuse to perform their military duties: “Those who evade this holy duty, disobey God and our Prophet. God will not forgive them, and our Prophet is displeased with them.”<sup>19</sup> They are further reminded that draft avoidance and desertion will be severely punished in afterlife:

It is an ignominy to make up excuses or pretend sickness in order to avoid military service. The humanity of those who do this is questionable. Great punishments await those who desert the army or run away after being conscripted.

If those deserters are caught, they will be punished according to military laws. But

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<sup>18</sup> The literature on these theoretical dilemmas is too extensive to do justice within the context of this chapter. For a focus on this topic, see, John Kelsay and James Turner ed., *Just War and Jihad: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on War and Peace in Western and Islamic Traditions* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Ruldolf Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam: A Reader* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 209.

these punishments are nothing compared to the punishments they will undergo in afterlife. God heralded tremendous suffering for them.<sup>20</sup>

But, in addition to forbidding disobedience, this insinuation seeks to instill a positive enthusiasm for the performance of military obligations:

Our Prophet decreed: “Run to the barracks when you are called for service.”

Obedying this command, and running to the barracks with joy is our obligation.<sup>21</sup>

Through such appeals, a possibly troublesome citizenship obligation is projected as a desirable experience whereby religious fulfillment can be sought, and worth proven.

Amongst the blessings associated with military service, perhaps the most important is martyrdom. It is identified as “the highest honor in Islam after the rank of the Prophet.”<sup>22</sup> If need be, soldiers must willingly sacrifice themselves for the nation and achieve this honorable status. However, a healthy passion for martyrdom should not be confused with suicidal military conduct, a formidable sin in Islam. Warning the soldiers against such a misinterpretation, the book stresses that faith, in fact, has the potential to protect troops and bring victory.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the republic’s stress on “rational” religion elsewhere (shrine visitations, etc.,) and its criticism of superstition, the view that faith has a life-saving potential in combat is sometimes supported with fantastical examples. For instance, it is suggested that Ottoman Sultan Mehmet and his army were preserved during the siege of Belgrade (1456) as a result of their faith. After being wounded during battle, the Sultan attempts to energize his army and convince them to continue fighting:

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 173.



Soldiers! The enemy bullets reach those who fear them. When I, for a second, thought of hiding from them, one thus hit me. Look, now, I proudly expose my chest to them, and none can touch it; it is as if the bullets are afraid of me. Yes, bullets fear the faithful. Wretched material cannot penetrate sublime/holy (*ulvi*) things.<sup>24</sup>

Islamic faith here operates as a shield against foreign bullets – “wretched material.” The Turkish victory at Çanakkale (Dardanelles) (1915-16) during the First World War is another example of the miraculous effect of religious faith:

Remember Çanakkale! There, Turks significantly lacked provisions and weaponry compared to the enemy. But their hearts were enflamed by the love of God. With such enflamed hearts, they attacked the enemy, roaring, “Allah Allah,” and all who dared to stand against them perished.<sup>25</sup>

The message the conscripts are intended to take is clear. They should not let fear obstruct their religiously sanctioned military obligations. When at war, their major asset should be their faith, which would help them preserve their lives while carrying their nation from victory to victory.

This emphasis on the life-saving potential of religious military fervor is important insofar as it manifests the army’s cautious attempt to counterbalance the glorification of selfless military conduct with the nationalist need for the effective defense of the homeland. It thus becomes clear that military education intends to cultivate not a blind quest for martyrdom, but a disciplined martial heroism and (if need be) a regulated

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 173.

passion for martyrdom for the nation, which helps advance national interests and state prerogatives.

Finally, the moral support the martyrdom discourse seeks to provide should be noted. The religious idiom of martyrdom provides the political community, and in particular the families of soldiers, who are either currently serving or have lost their lives during service, with a powerful psychological support when and if life is lost during military service. The need for such support has been especially pronounced since the onset of the Kurdish insurgency in 1984. Thousands of conscripts have lost their lives in the military operations undertaken against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party). With its emphasis on the martyrdom discourse, which intensified as a result of the war, military discourse thus seeks to promise immortality to those who are put in harm's way, while assuring the broader community of the value of national sacrifice.<sup>26</sup>

Importantly, the Kurdish insurgency and the ensuing conditions of socio-political insecurity helped facilitate the extension of the religious content of military education into the civilian sphere. This development was part of a broader transformation occurring in post-1980s Turkey. In 1980, the Turkish military intervened in politics for the third time, and took charge of the government for three years. The coup was justified as a patriotic response to the political disintegration and social chaos produced by the

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<sup>26</sup> The insurgency also pushed the state to make xenophobic claims such as the portraying of the insurgents as non-Muslims – Armenians or Zoroastrians who plot against national unity, and against whom Turkish and Kurdish Muslims had an obligation to fight. The current speaker of the Turkish Parliament, Cemil Çiçek, commented in 2010: "There is close collaboration between Armenian terrorism and the terrorism of the PKK. The fact that some terrorists are not circumcised says volumes." "Bazı PKK'lılar sünnetsiz," *Milliyet*, August 21, 2010, accessed Jan 20, 2014, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-bazi-pkk-lilar-sunnetsiz-/guncel/haberdetay/21.08.2010/1279153/default.htm>

Prime Minister Erdoğan further argued that Kurdish insurgents are Zoroastrians. "Erdoğan: Bu teröristlerin yeri belli, bunlar Zerdüş," *T24*, October 20, 2012, accessed Jan 30, 2014, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/Erdoğan-teroru-kardeslik-ruhuyla-dayanisma-halinde-asacagiz/215650>.

ideological struggles (between leftwing and rightwing movements) of the previous decade. Laying particular blame for the unrest on communism, and in an effort to suppress its appeal, the junta forged an alliance with the sponsors of an ideological movement known as the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis.<sup>27</sup> Developed by a group of conservative intellectuals, *Aydınlar Ocagi* (Hearth of the Enlightened), the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis was a cultural program advocating the systematic integration of Sunni Islamic values into the Turkish public sphere.<sup>28</sup> Toning down the secularist tenets of Turkish civil religion, the project intended to reenergize popular Islamic attachment and thus prevent national disintegration.

Following the official endorsement of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis in the National Culture Report of the State Planning Organization, a substantial revision of the national school curricula was inaugurated.<sup>29</sup> As Sam Kaplan has shown, the most striking feature of the revised curricula was its emphasis on the Islamic valuation of the nation and nationalist duties. Consistent with the new religion's emphasis on the superiority of the Turkish Islam, the curricula began to depict Atatürk's Turkey as the leader of the Muslim world. This, for instance, is the tenor of "Directives on Basic Instruction of Atatürk's Reforms and Principles for Primary and Secondary Schools," which directs teachers and textbooks to stress "how the Turks have rendered military services throughout the history of Islam [and] how the Turkish War of Liberation was a victory

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<sup>27</sup> Cizre Sakallıoğlu, "Parameters and Strategies," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996): 246-7.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Bozkurt Guvenc et al, *Türk-Islam Sentezi* (Istanbul: Sarmal Yayınevi, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Sam Kaplan, "Religious Nationalism: A Textbook Case from Turkey," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25:3 (2005): 665-76.

for Islam.”<sup>30</sup>

Paralleling the content of military education, students were also instructed in the natural synergy between the Turkish nation’s military skills and Islamic faith. It was argued that the Turks – “a nation of soldiers from birth” – converted to Islam because this religion best “fit their spirit of warfare.”<sup>31</sup> The curricula also began to foreground the Islamic significance of nationalist sacrifice, and drew upon the religious traditions of *gazi* and *şehit*.<sup>32</sup> For instance, third graders read the story of “Hennaed Mehmet,” which is about a mother who smears henna on her son’s hands as he is about to depart for his military service. In Turkish culture, henna is applied to mark an important event such as a wedding or a religious sacrifice. When the commander of the son asks the mother why she is performing this ritual on this occasion, the mother assumes the role of the teacher, and educates both her son and the commander on the relationship between Islam, nationalism, and sacrificial obligations of citizenship:

We stain the sheep with henna so that they be a sacrifice to Allah. Also my son, we put henna on the young men who go to the army. We smear henna on them so that they may be a sacrifice to the fatherland. We sacrificed your grandfather in the Balkan Wars [in 1913] and your uncle at Çanakkale. If it need be, my child, you will be a sacrifice for this fatherland.<sup>33</sup>

The boundaries between religious and nationalist sentiments and obligations effectively disappear in this narrative. The state and its army are sanctified as all-powerful

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<sup>30</sup> Sam Kaplan, “Din-u Devlet All Over Again? The Politics of Military Secularism and Religious Militarism in Turkey Following the 1980 Coup,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34:1 (2002): 122.

<sup>31</sup> Kaplan, “Din-u Devlet,” 120.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 121.

institutions that can legitimately demand sacrifice. The message that the school-children are hereby intended to derive is that it is their religiously sanctioned duty to obey the state and defend their nation – if need be with their lives.

The eight-grade reader similarly stresses the religious meaning of sacrificial citizenship dispositions – “People who sacrifice their own existence for that of the nation and state are worthy to be loved and respected. They shoulder an important responsibility toward God in their duties”<sup>34</sup> – and call out to male students: “My son, let him grow up and become a soldier. If he dies he will be a martyr for the faith; if he lives, a holy warrior.”<sup>35</sup> Inculcating a religiously substantiated patriotic duty in this way, the post-1980s secular school system thus contributed to the project of engendering an obedient and pious citizenry who would faithfully defend the nation.

In sum, it becomes clear that Turkish militarism has been influenced not only by the rituals and discourses of secular nationalism, but, importantly, of pre-republican Islamic values of jihad and martyrdom. Integrated within the discourses and practices of the civil religion, these religious concepts help generate the affective resources required for the performance of difficult duties, including self-sacrifice. This use of religious discourse and imaginary within the secularist Turkish military demonstrates that to enable people to respond to the political demand for sacrifice, the modern republic needs not only the myths and rituals associated with secular nationalism, but also, religious meaning and valuation, which appears to more strongly (and perhaps reliably) motivate people.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I examined the elements of Turkish civil religion, which involved the combined pursuit of the construction of a distinct formulation of modern nationalism and the re-structuring of Islam. More specifically, consistent with Rousseau's emphasis on the generation of a patriotic national culture, the republic constructed, on the one hand, a form of secular Turkish nationalism, aiming to attach citizen's hearts and minds to the modern nation-state. Heavily influenced by Ataturk's thinking, this new national imaginary involved controversial historical myths – the Turkish History and Language Theses –, offering ethnic/racial and linguistic basis for Turkish nationhood as well as new state rituals and cults – the cult of the republic and the cult of Ataturk –, designed to provoke emotional attachments and devotion to the republic.

However, secular nationalism, on its own, was insufficient to create the robust citizenship ethos envisioned by the nationalist modernizers. This had partially to do with the elements of the new nationalism. While the historical myths it offered failed to provoke pride and enthusiasm, its rituals and cults gradually led to a polarization within society, raising questions about the elitism of secular nationalist discourses in Turkey. But the most important reason for the inability of secular nationalism alone to command complete allegiance and sacrifice was the resilience of Islamic beliefs and attachments in the society. Thus, in addition, Turkey was required to pursue the more controversial Hobbesian strategy examined in the first chapter of this dissertation. That is, it undertook a re-construction of Islam itself to render this religion compatible with republican politics. The re-constructed Islam was a “Janus-faced” formation, involving not a complete rejection of traditional Islamic values and practices, but a selective accommodation and

pragmatic reshaping of them. In particular, Islamic traditions that were considered to be beneficial to nationalist politics were accommodated and promoted by the state. As the most transparent demonstration of this process, I examined Turkey's use of Islamic traditions of warfare and martyrdom in universal conscription, an institution that is most readily associated with nationalist sacrifice and republican citizenship.

This analysis has important further implications. In the first instance, the formation of Turkish civil religion through the combined pursuit of the construction of a new nationalist ethos and secular faith and the remaking of traditional religion provides a powerful illustration of the broader theoretical argument raised in the previous chapter. That is, civil religion, understood as a political strategy (to reconfigure the relationship between politics and religion in modern states) as developed by Rousseau, involves not only the generation of a public faith based on state rituals and patriotic myths, but also a new religious imaginary, grounded in a theological structure and ethics. As Turkish civil religion's selective accommodation and reinterpretation of traditional Islamic discourses have shown, it is this complicated process that helps explain both the ability of civil religion to penetrate and animate the masses, and arguably its inherently tension-ridden character.

Second, the theoretical inconsistencies attending the selective accommodation of religion within the discourses of civil religion must be noted. As we have seen, in the Turkish context, the need to render Islam safe for secular politics while also requiring the emotional resources and conviction it could provide to mobilize the masses led the state to adopt an ambivalent, and at times contradictory, approach towards the religious notions and values available in the social structure. For instance, we have seen that while

most practices of folk religion were rejected as “superstition,” the republic did not refrain from promoting other forms of “irrational” beliefs in order to provoke national enthusiasm – such as the view that the faithful would not be affected by bullets in combat. While these theoretical paradoxes may not necessarily lead to failures in motivating the people, they certainly harbor enough tension to raise concerns about the sincerity of the discourses of civil religion – which may, in its turn, generate possible critique and opposition.

But the more important problem concerns the strains and incompleteness that necessarily attends these kinds of grand political attempts to re-construct religious meaning and valuation. On the one hand, while Turkey’s ambitious project to bring Islam under complete state control, and thereby tame its power, has been largely successful – as demonstrated by the prevalence of statist and nationalist discourses of religion in Turkey<sup>36</sup> – it could not bring an end to all competing religious interpretations. While marginalized, Islamic values and practices that diverged from the hegemonic interpretation continued to exist alongside, and in tension with, the official discourses.<sup>37</sup>

More poignantly, the incorporation of some Islamic doctrines and values (deemed beneficial for national interest) within the discourses and practices of Turkish civil religion opened the door for new sites of contestation. While the republic invested formidable energy in “fixing,” and regulating, the re-interpretations it offered for these

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Tanıl Bora, “Nationalist Discourses,” Umut Özkırımlı, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Cf., Mardin, *Religion, Society*; Jenny White, “Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey, Volume, 4*, ed. Resat Kasaba (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 357-80; M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).



adopted concepts and values, having their origins outside the state, these religious ideals were to some extent independent of sovereign control. This meant that they could operate in ways the consequences of which may neither be immediately clear nor necessarily beneficial to state prerogatives. These theological concepts and imaginings could thus be re-signified to generate conflicting motivations and affects. In short, by accommodating the elements of traditional Islam within the discourses and practices of the new civil religion, Turkey also empowered these elements. While apparently necessary to sustain and advance strong citizenship obligations, this arrangement thus involved the possibility of their transformation into a basis of resistance against the state and its impositions.

In the next chapter, I present an important instance of such critical opposition to the interpretation of Islamic discourses of warfare and sacrifice within the discourses of civil religion – namely, an emergent Islamist conscientious objection to the draft.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Islamist Conscientious Objection in Turkey

Given the previous chapter's analysis of the codification of military service as a sacred citizenship duty and an important obligation of Islamic faith, it should not come as a surprise that antimilitarism - and in particular a conscientious refusal to serve - is a highly marginal stance in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> Demonstrating the modern state's overall success in normalizing this codification, the majority of men in Turkey perform their martial duties with honor and enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup> The high esteem in which universal conscription is held is further illustrated by popular honorific names/titles used in reference to military duties and institutions. For instance, the Turkish army is conventionally referred to as *Peygamber Ocağı* (the Hearth of the Prophet), and the affectionate name used for conscripted soldiers is *Mehmetçik* ("little Muhammad," after the name of the Prophet).

Consistent with this ideological stance, the constitution and laws of the republic do not recognize conscientious objection to conscription – and this is the case despite the fact that international institutions of which Turkey is a member such as the United Nations and European Convention on Human Rights consider conscientious objection to be a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief.<sup>3</sup> This refusal makes Turkey, along with Azerbaijan, the only member of the

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<sup>1</sup> A recent study, conducted by Istanbul Bilgi University, Bilkent University, and KONDA Research and Consultancy showed 81.8 percent support for conscription. In addition, 2 out of every 3 participants opposed paid military service. Cf. "Bilmedikleri 'vicdani ret'e karşılar," *Radikal*, November 25, 2011, accessed Jan 30, 2013, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25300286>. See also, Zeki Sarigil, "Deconstructing the Turkish Military's Popularity," *Armed Forces & Society* 35: 4 (2008): 709-727.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the ethnographic account of the popularity of military duties amongst Turkish men in particular, Emma Sinclair-Webb's "Our Bülent is now a Commando."

<sup>3</sup> The relevant clauses are Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>), and Article 18 of the Universal Declaration

Council of Europe whose legal statutes lacks any provision concerning conscientious objection. In the absence of laws regulating their act, COs are thus imprisoned for a series of crimes that do not actually correspond to their civil resistance. These include desertion, persistent disobedience, and alienating the public from the institution of military service. When found “guilty” of any of these charges, COs are imprisoned for periods ranging from three months to possibly two years.<sup>4</sup> With military service being codified as a mandatory citizenship duty for all male subjects, COs are condemned to a life of illegality even after release. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) defines their subsequent living conditions as “civil death,” resulting in “an inability to vote, marry, legally register a child, work, or get a passport.”<sup>5</sup>

But despite these significant difficulties that interfere with the exercise of even the most basic human rights, Turkey has had a small but continuing conscientious objection struggle since the early 1990s. Emerging as a secular and predominantly anarchist anti-war resistance against the war between the Turkish army and the Kurdish guerilla, conscientious objection struggle gradually evolved to include other forms of ethical, political, and religious convictions. In this chapter, my aim is to focus on an emergent Islamist conscientious objection and the challenge it poses to the culturally strong and politically orchestrated intertwining between religion, nationalism, and militarism in Turkey – a convulsion, as we have seen, that has been systematically promoted by Turkish civil religion.

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of Human Rights (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>). For further details, see Özgür Heval Çınar, “A View on International Implementation of the Right to Conscientious Objection, in *Conscientious Objection: Resisting Militarized Society*, ed. Özgür Heval Çınar and Coşkun Üsterci (New York: Zed Books, 2009), 183-98.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hülya Üçpınar, “The Criminality of Conscientious Objection in Turkey and its Consequences,” in *Conscientious Objection*, 242-56.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. “Turkey: Human Rights and the Armed Forces,” War Resisters International, December 2011, accessed Jan 28, 2013, <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/14403>.

The chapter will proceed as follows. I will first offer a brief summary of the history of conscientious objection struggle in Turkey, highlighting the transformations the movement has gone through since the early 1990s. The emergence of an Islamist grouping within the broader movement is a late development, dating not further back than 2007. Situating this development within the broader debates concerning conscription and military duties within Turkey's Islamist public sphere, I will then proceed to a detailed examination of this act of civil disobedience and how it challenges Turkey's authorization of a particular religious imaginary in its military.

As we shall see, Islamist COs problematize the nationalist and militarist interpretations of theological concepts invoked to legitimize conscription and sacrificial obligations of citizenship – in particular jihad and martyrdom – and thereby oppose the sovereign limitations set upon religious meaning and imaginary. Drawing upon their own reading of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, and mobilizing alternative sources of interpretation available not only in Islamic traditions (such as Sufism), but also within the broader social structure (anarchism, anti-capitalism, and so forth), they propose original counter-interpretations for the authorizing religious norms of Turkish civil religion. Their critique highlights in particular the theoretical inconsistencies and normative tensions involved in the deployment of Islamic martial values with respect to the defense of a secular nation-state. These include the problems related to the fact that Turkey is a democratic nation-state, that conscription is compulsory in that country, and that the Turkish army is a standing army, involved in combat against another Muslim nation, the Kurds. Elaborating on these points, Islamist COs' theoretical critique transforms religious norms

incorporated within the discourses of Turkish civil religion into a basis of opposition to the sacrificial obligations of citizenship.

The chapter will conclude by highlighting how this critique helps reveal some of the broader theoretical dilemmas concerning the political strategies advanced to resolve the sacrificial problematic discussed in the foregoing chapters. We have seen that in the case of Turkish civil religion both the attempt to generate a national faith and the reconstruction of traditional religion were involved. An important consequence of this process was the incorporation and empowering of a particular nationalist and militarist interpretation of religion, in reference especially to military duties and sacrifice. But, the emergence of Islamist conscientious objection shows that the state's empowerment of theological imaginaries in order to advance national interests involves the risk of generating new sites of resistance against secular sovereignty. That is, even when the state imposes rigorous control over religion and society, there is always the possibility that critical discourses such as Turkey's Islamist conscientious objection will emerge and challenge the imposed religious interpretation and its sacrificial normativity – hence revealing that sacrifice may remain as a paradox haunting politics, even after its theological valuation.

A final note on methodology. The analysis that will be presented in this chapter is based upon ethnographic research. Over the course of three years – between 2010 and 2013 –, I met and conducted semi-structured interviews with around thirty members of Turkey's conscientious objection movement. With the majority of the Islamist COs, more than one interview was conducted. This research was carried out primarily in Istanbul, currently the center of the CO movement, where I also attended several meetings and

protests organized by the Conscientious Objection Association and the group Anticapitalist Muslims. At these meetings, I met and had conversations with many antimilitarist and CO-rights activists whose insights and experiences helped shape the following observations. In addition to these activists and COs, I have interviewed several Islamist intellectuals such as Ihsan Eliaçık whose teaching and ideas have directly or indirectly influenced the theoretical arguments raised by some of the Islamist COs. The majority of the COs, activists, and thinkers I interviewed and talked to gave permission to use their names. But there were also some who chose to remain partially anonymous. In such cases, I used only the first name of the CO, while using a capital letter for the last name. Thus, unless otherwise noted, all the ethnographic data that is presented below draws upon this research and field study.

### **The Short History of Conscientious Objection in Turkey**

Turkey's conscientious objection movement emerged as a secularist antiwar protest in the most intense period of the war between the Turkish army and the PKK (in early 1990s).<sup>6</sup> The movement problematized in particular Turkey's conscription policies

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<sup>6</sup> This contrasts with the CO movements in Europe and North America. With its origins in Christian pacifism, these conscientious objection struggles evolved to include ethical and political refusals to the draft after the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. Charles C. Moskos and John W. Chambers II. emphasize that although religious conscientious objection continues to exist in Europe and North America, it has declined proportionately in the face of the dynamic growth of secular COs, a phenomenon they call "the secularization of conscience." Charles C. Moskos, John Whiteclay Chambers II ed., *The New Conscientious Objection: From Sacred to Secular Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). In Turkey, on the other hand, conscientious objection emerged as a secular anarchist movement, and only recently came to include religious groups. A similar case is Israel, another Middle Eastern country with strong military traditions. Israel's CO movement also emerged as a leftist political resistance. A small group of citizens referred to as *refuseniks* began to refuse military duties in the Occupied Territories after the 1982 Lebanon war. But, this trend seems to be changing. Following the recent outlawing of the exemptions granted to Yeshiva students, ultra-Orthodox Jews began to demand the recognition of conscientious objection. Moreover, new religious *refuseniks* emerged, who support the occupation, and refuse to comply with military orders such as the evacuation of illegal Jewish settlement. Cf. Sara Helman, "Negotiating Obligations, Creating Rights: Conscientious Objection and the Redefinition of Citizenship

and the increasing militarization of the Kurdish and Turkish societies as a result of the violent conflict. The first conscientious objection and antimilitarist activists were secular anarchists. For instance, the conscientious objection declaration of Turkey's first COs – Vedat Zencir and the late Tayfun Gönül – put particular emphasis on the secular character of their refusal to serve, and their opposition to all forms of organized violence. Zencir argued:

I value the life of each individual as equally sacred as my own without attributing any religious significance to it. Thus, I cannot be part of any institution that sets out to kill for any reason.<sup>7</sup>

Under the initiative of these first activists, Turkey's first War Resisters' Association (*Savaş Karşıtları Derneği*) was established in 1992 in the Aegean city of Izmir. The Association aimed to raise awareness about conscientious objection by organizing public conscientious objection declarations and panels focusing on the history and achievements of conscientious objection struggles elsewhere. The goal was to convince the public that this act of civil disobedience could undermine militarism in Turkey too, and thus help mobilize a broader antiwar resistance. In this context, the War Resisters' Association formed ties with COs and war resisters' institutions in other countries. In the summer of 1993, for instance, an International Conscientious Objection Meeting was organized in a small town near Izmir, bringing together around a hundred activists from many different countries. The Association and the new forms of

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in Israel," *Citizenship Studies* 3:1 (1999): 45-70; Eyal Press, "Israel's Holy Warriors," *The New York Review of Books*, March 31, 2010, accessed Feb 4, 2014, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/apr/29/israels-holy-warriors/?pagination=false>.

<sup>7</sup> Can Başkent, ed., *Vicdani Ret Açıklamaları Almanagi: 1989-2010* (Istanbul, Turkey: Propaganda Yayınları: 2011), 13.

13. Vedat Zencir declared his conscientious objection in a joint declaration with Tayfun Gönül, who passed away in 2012.

antimilitarist activism it practiced soon raised suspicion in Izmir governor's office that began to closely monitor its activities. Demonstrating the illegitimacy of antimilitarist politics in Turkey, the governor's office asked the Association to remove references to antimilitarism from its charter. When this request was refused and in response to the activists' continuing attempt to raise awareness about conscientious objection, the governor's office eventually closed down the Association in 1993.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly after, CO rights and antimilitarist activists established a new organization. The location was again Izmir, but the new organization's name was slightly modified: Izmir War Resisters' Association (ISKD). Like the closed down War Resisters' Association, ISKD continued to organize events and protests aimed at drawing attention to the CO-rights struggle, and criticized the ongoing war in Turkey's Southeast. Antimilitarist activists like Osman Murat Ülke – who later became the first CO imprisoned for his refusal to serve in Turkey – publicly burned their draft calls, and called out both to the Turkish soldiers and Kurdish guerilla to refuse to partake in the war.<sup>9</sup> While the organization and antimilitarist activism in general remained marginal throughout the 1990s, ISKD was relatively successful in drawing the Turkish Left's and especially university students' attention to conscientious objection. For instance, in late 1990s a small group of activists formed a spin-off organization in Istanbul, using the name War Resisters' Association, and thus extended antimilitarist activism to other cities.

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this history, see Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth*, 87-117.

<sup>9</sup> Osman Murat Ülke spent 701 days in imprisonment as a result of eight separate convictions between 1996 and 1999. In 2006, he appealed to ECtHR. In *Affaire Ülke c. Turquie* (Ülke v. Turkey), the court found Turkey guilty of violating the prohibition against degrading treatment under Article 3 of the European Convention. Turkey was sentenced to pay monetary compensation to Ülke, and was also asked to implement a legal framework "providing an appropriate means of dealing with situations arising from the refusal to perform military service on account of one's beliefs." While Turkey paid the said compensation to Ülke, it has still not reformed its legal system. Cf. "European Court of Human Rights affirms the right to conscientious objection to military service," War Resisters' International, July 7, 2011, accessed June 5, 2014, <http://www.wri-irg.org/de/node/13272>.



The group in Istanbul also published an antimilitarist magazine entitled *Nisyan* for a brief period of time. Nonetheless, by 2000, due to continuing political pressure and diminishing funds available to the small group of activists involved in the organization, both the Izmir and Istanbul branches of the War Resisters' Association were shut down. In their place, an anonymous web-based discussion group and an antimilitarist website (*savaskarsitlari Yahoo group* and *www.savaskarsitlari.org*) were established.

By mid-2000s, CO rights activists began to re-organize, looking for new venues and means to pursue the struggle. In this vein, a new Platform based in Istanbul and entitled the Conscientious Objection for Peace (*Barış İçin Vicdani Ret Platformu*) was established. The organization was run by a new generation of activists, who eventually founded the Conscientious Objection Association (*Vicdani Ret Derneği*) in Istanbul in 2013. Organizing demonstrations, conferences, and so forth, the Conscientious Objection Association's primary aim is to make conscientious objection and war resistance an important element of political activism in Turkey. Compared to the War Resisters' organizations preceding it, the Conscientious Objection Association also brings together activists from a wider and more diverse spectrum of ideological orientations and political convictions.<sup>10</sup> Activists self-identifying as feminist, socialist, and Kurdish have become prominent voices within the organization in the last decade, bringing the number of COs associated with the Association to approximately 300.<sup>11</sup> Indicating an extension in the social outreach of antimilitarist political orientations and a broader transformation within the society at large, the new COs criticize the gendered character of militarism in Turkey in addition to the continuing oppression of the Kurds.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Özgür Heval Çınar and Coşkun Üsterci ed., *Conscientious Objection*.

<sup>11</sup> For the records, see Türkiye'de VR Acıklayanlar," Savas Karsitlari, accessed Feb 14, 2014, <http://www.savaskarsitlari.org/arsiv.asp?ArsivTipID=2>.

The involvement of women within the movement has become especially noteworthy in this period. While women are not conscripted in Turkey, they declare their objection as an act of resistance and “confrontation,” in the words of Hilal Demir who declared her objection in 2004 “against militarism, against all forms of war, violence, and discrimination.”<sup>12</sup> Currently, there are roughly fifty women COs in Turkey, whose objections emphasize the connection between patriarchal gender norms and militarism, and the necessity of fighting against them together. Women CO Merve Artun, who is also the co-chair of the Conscientious Objection Association, similarly stresses that the demilitarization of gender norms and roles is the flipside of the struggle for conscientious objection and peace.<sup>13</sup> She continues to emphasize that women’s involvement in the CO movement is crucial particularly because women are the victims of the Turkish-Kurdish war while not acknowledged to be so. To raise awareness of this point and to promote antimilitarist agency and peace activism amongst women, the Conscientious Objection Association organizes special events addressing war and feminism.

Importantly, feminist activists also reach out to bereaving mothers who have lost their sons in the war, and invite them to the activities of the movement.<sup>14</sup> As a result of their activities, the CO-struggle has become deeply involved in peace and reconciliation activism, resulting in new collaboration between the CO-rights activists and other civil society institutions focusing on this issue.

In addition to the above outlined developments, the later phase of CO rights movement in Turkey also saw the emergence of two new groups involved in

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<sup>12</sup> Hilal Demir, “A Feminist Perspective on Conscientious Objection in Turkey,” War Resisters’ International, January 5, 2011, accessed June 11, 2014, <http://wri-irg.org/es/node/11984>.

<sup>13</sup> Author’s interview with Merve Artun, 3 June 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. “Umraniye’de Baris Anneleri ve Vicdani Reticilerle Soylesi,” Savas Karsitlari, August 31, 2012, accessed June 5, 2014, <http://www.savaskarsitlari.org/arsiv.asp?ArsivTipID=8&ArsivAnaID=69110>.

conscientious objection struggle alongside the activists associated with the Association. First, distinguishing themselves from the Kurdish activists working within the broader CO movement, some Kurdish activists formed an independent platform, entitled the Kurdish Conscientious Objection Initiative (*Kürt Vicdanî Ret İnisiyatifi*) in 2010. The Kurdish Initiative organizes collective CO declarations. The antimilitarist website [www.savaskarsitlari.org](http://www.savaskarsitlari.org) reports the current number of Kurdish COs associated with the Kurdish Conscientious Objection Initiative as approximately 257. However (and unlike other COs affiliated with the broader CO rights movement), the identities of all Kurdish COs are not made public. In fact, a significant number amongst them choose to remain anonymous. In such cases, a representative of the Kurdish Conscientious Objection Initiative announces the number of the new COs, and makes a public speech on their behalf. Importantly, the Initiative is not an antimilitarist organization, and it endorses the use of violence in Kurdish national independence struggle.<sup>15</sup> This ideological stance distinguishes the Initiative and the Kurdish COs who are members of it, from other Kurdish citizens who have declared their conscientious objection and oppose both Turkish and Kurdish militarism such as the prominent Kurdish CO and peace activist Halil Savda. As Savda commented, the separate existence of the Kurdish Conscientious Objection Initiative and its public endorsement of the violent struggle of the PKK preclude coalition building and partnership between the Initiative and the broader CO movement currently represented by the Conscientious Objection Association.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the political stance of the Initiative, see the interview with a spokesperson, Ahmet Demirsoy. Atalay Göcek, "Muazzam Bir Gelisme," *Biamag*, May 14, 2011, accessed Feb 1, 2014, <http://www.bianet.org/biamag/ifade-ozgurlugu/129978-muazzam-bir-gelisme>.

<sup>16</sup> Author's interviews and conversations with Halil Savda, December 2012 and the summer of 2013.

In addition, since the mid-2000s several Turkish citizens who are Jehovah's Witnesses have begun to declare their conscientious objection and confront the Turkish state on this issue. As it is the case with most members of the Kurdish Conscientious Objection Initiative, COs who are Jehovah's Witnesses do not make individual public declarations of their conscientious objection. In fact, the majority of Jehovah's Witnesses who claim CO status choose to remain anonymous as long as possible – that is, until their refusal is brought to public attention as a result of court cases or imprisonment. Even then, Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to talk to the press and independent researchers about their conscientious objection.<sup>17</sup> Given this preference, the information we have about this group comes largely from publicized legal proceedings involving COs who are Jehovah's Witnesses. As a member of the group commented in a phone conversation (while rejecting my request for an appointment), the primary reason for this stance is that Jehovah's Witnesses consider their act of civil disobedience principally as an issue of, and struggle for, religious freedom, rather than a form of political opposition to conscription or Turkish militarism.

Undoubtedly, this self-incurred depoliticization of their resistance must also have to do with the fear of persecution. As members of a minority religion, Jehovah's Witnesses must be worried that their association with political groups involved in resistance to Turkish conscription policies and militarism may further marginalize the group and thereby interfere with their religious observance. Thus, they distinguish their oppositional stance from other forms of antimilitarist activism and CO rights struggle in

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<sup>17</sup> During my fieldwork, I had repeatedly attempted to arrange interviews with the members of the movement, and all of my requests were refused.

Turkey and refuse to partake in the demonstrations and events organized by activists associated with the Conscientious Objection Association.

However, despite Jehovah Witnesses' insistence on the categorical difference of their religiously grounded conscientious objection from other acts of refusal in Turkey, COs who are Jehovah Witness are persecuted on the basis of the same legal regulations concerning conscription. In fact, the conscientious objection struggle of this religious group first came to public attention as a result of the imprisonment of a famous basketball player who is a Jehovah's Witness, Barış Görmez, for his refusal to serve. Görmez's claim to CO status was refused for four years, the large part of which he spent in jail for persistent disobedience to fulfill his mandatory obligation to serve in the army. But an important development concerning the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses in Turkey occurred during this time. Two other COs who are Jehovah's Witnesses appealed to the ECtHR, accusing Turkey for violating Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which concerns the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, by refusing to grant the members of this pacifist religious group the right to conscientious objection.<sup>18</sup> Agreeing with the arguments of the plaintiffs, the ECtHR condemned Turkey in *Yunus Ercep v. Turkey* (Application 43965/04) in November 2011, and shortly after, in the case of *Feti Demirtaş* (Application No. 5260/07) in January 2012 for violating Jehovah's Witnesses' religious freedom to be exempt from conscription.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rather than Article 3, referring to degrading and inhuman treatment, which had previously been the clause the ECtHR referred to in CO cases.

<sup>19</sup> Since the July 2011 *Bayatyan v. Armenia* ruling (involving the conscientious objection of a Jehovah's Witness in Armenia), the ECtHR has begun to unequivocally categorize conscientious objection under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. After the *Bayatyan* decision, the European Convention's pressure on Turkey to adapt its domestic law to international human rights standards had increased. Cf. Mine Yıldırım, "TURKEY: Selective progress on conscientious objection," *Forum 18 News Service*, May 1, 2012, accessed June 1, 2014, [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=1696](http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1696).

Following these legal victories of Jehovah's Witnesses in the ECtHR, a Turkish court issued a surprising rule concerning the conscientious objection of Barış Görmez – whose objection and persecution became representative of the troubles Jehovah's Witnesses face in Turkey. Drawing upon the decision of the ECtHR, the Turkish court confirmed that Article 9 should selectively apply to the COs who are Jehovah Witnesses.<sup>20</sup> With this decision, the conscientious objection of Barış Görmez was acknowledged and he was released from jail, and declared exempt from conscription.<sup>21</sup> Significantly however, this selective acknowledgement did not lead to any further transformation within the existing legal statutes concerning mandatory conscription and conscientious objection in Turkey. Put differently, while this recent legal precedent opened the door to selective acknowledgement of CO status for Jehovah's Witnesses on account of the pacifist convictions of their faith (and as an issue of religion freedom), it did not inspire any further legal developments concerning the conscientious objection of other Turkish citizens. As such, this development resulted in the furthering of the existing separation of the COs who are Jehovah's Witnesses and their interests from the broader CO rights struggle in Turkey.

In sum, the struggle for conscientious objection in Turkey has expanded since the early 2000s to include a wider range of political and religious orientations. In addition to the secular anarchists who initiated the CO rights movement, feminists, Kurdish rights activists, and some religious groups like Jehovah's Witnesses, have begun to demand the

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that this decision also implies that what should be determinative for granting exemption from military service is not the beliefs and convictions of an individual, but the dominant theological stance of the broader religious group s/he is a part of. Given the prevalent militaristic interpretation of Islam in Turkish official discourse, this means that the religion of the vast majority of Turkish citizens, Islam, cannot be offered as a legitimate ground for seeking exemption from conscription in that country. I will address this point in more detail in the conclusion of the chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ekin Karaca, "Yehova Sahidini Vicdani Ret Hakkı," *Bianet*, March 13, 2012, accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/bianet/136899-yehova-sahidi-ne-vicdani-ret-hakki>.

right to conscientious objection. Although these groups do not necessarily collaborate or work together to pursue this cause, the proliferation of antimilitarist and CO rights activism amongst different segments of the population indicate a broader discomfort with conscription policies and militarism at large. Importantly, however, even during this period of expansion, a critique of conscription and militarism grounded in the majority religion Islam did not seem to be a part of antimilitarist politics and discourses. Demonstrating the popular endorsement of the previously examined militarist interpretations of Islam in the discourses of Turkish nationalism, the majority of Turkey's Muslims thus seemed to support compulsory conscription and its religious valuation.<sup>22</sup>

But, this situation began to change toward the end of 2000s when a pious Muslim, Enver Aydemir, declared his conscientious objection, grounding his refusal to serve – for the first time in Turkey – in his Islamic faith.

### **The Case of Enver Aydemir**

Aydemir's struggle with Turkish militarism came to public attention in July 2007, when he was forcefully taken to a Soldiers Training Brigade in Bilecik, a small town in northwest Anatolia, to perform his compulsory military service. Aged 33 at the time, and the father of two children, Aydemir was a CO, and he had previously informed the local draft office of this status. At the Brigade, he restated this position and refused to wear the military uniform. This triggered an arduous struggle between Aydemir and the Turkish military. Complications had largely to do with the previously highlighted legal ambiguities concerning the CO status in Turkey. Because Turkey refuses to acknowledge conscientious objection, COs are persecuted for a series of crimes that do not correspond

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<sup>22</sup> See footnote 1.

to their actions. These include desertion and persistent insubordination as described in the Turkish Military Criminal Code, and the discouraging of individuals from performing their military service, stated in the Article 318 of the Turkish Penal Code (Former Article 155).<sup>23</sup> The latter offense is persecuted more severely if it is committed through public means of communication and print media. Treated as “an aggravating circumstance,” it increases the punishment by half (Articles 218 and 318).<sup>24</sup>

Accordingly, Aydemir was prosecuted for several of these other offenses instead of conscientious objection. First, following the restatement of his refusal in Bilecik, he was arrested and jailed in Eskisehir military prison for several months. In October of that year, he was brought before a military court but released on the condition that he promptly present himself to his unit. But Aydemir did not join his unit, which led to the issuing of another arrest warrant. In December 2009, he was re-arrested during a random identity check during a visit to Istanbul, where he was invited to deliver a speech on conscientious objection.<sup>25</sup> Once again, he was transferred to Eskisehir military prison, where he remained until his next trial on 30 March 2010. Charged with desertion, he was then sentenced to ten months. Because he had already served much of this time during pre-trial detention, he was sent to his military unit, starting yet another cycle of disobedience and sentencing. This continued until his last trial on June 2010, in which the charge was persistent insubordination. This time, the court decided that instead of jail or his unit, Aydemir would be sent to the Gülhane Military Medical Academy (GATA) in

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<sup>23</sup> “Current Situation In Turkey,” War Resisters’ International, accessed April 3, 2013, <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/20810>.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Hammarberg, “Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom in Turkey,” Council of Europe, accessed March 29, 2013, <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1814085>.

<sup>25</sup> “Turkey: Conscientious Objector at Risk of Imprisonment,” Amnesty International Reports, accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/turkey-conscientious-objector-risk-imprisonment-20071003>.



Ankara for psychiatric assessment. Consistent with his previous conduct, Aydemir refused to wear military clothing and to undergo psychiatric tests at GATA. Despite his refusal to cooperate, he was issued a medical report exempting him from military service on the grounds that he suffers from anti-social personality disorder, and was therefore unfit to serve.<sup>26</sup>

This Kafkaesque legal experience is not unique. Since the emergence of Turkey's CO movement, other COs have had similar experiences. As human rights lawyer Hülya Üçpınar reported, COs' lives are fractured through arbitrary interferences and severe restrictions.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the constant threat of imprisonment, they are deprived of fundamental citizenship rights including the right to vote. Because they are ineligible for formal employment, they are also impoverished.<sup>28</sup> These difficulties finally end when their opposition is delegitimized as pathological. This often takes two forms. The first is the branding of the insistence on CO status as a sign of antisocial personality disorder. As we have seen, this was what happened in Aydemir's case. The other concerns military regulations against conscripting homosexuals, a group the army considers categorically unfit to serve.<sup>29</sup> In the case of gay COs, courts rely on these regulations concerning homosexuality to disavow the political character of their resistance. Thus, either through questionable mental assessments or the deployment of homophobic military regulations,

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<sup>26</sup> Other COs before Aydemir, including Halil Savda and Mehmet Bal, were given similar medical reports, rendering their opposition pathological. Cf. "Turkey: Conscientious Objection is a Human Right Not a Personality Disorder," Amnesty International Report, accessed March 10, 2013, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR44/013/2010>.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. "Human Rights Committee Highlights Conscientious Objection in Turkey," War Resisters' International, Dec 12, 2012, accessed March 28, 2014, <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/20816>.

<sup>28</sup> As has been pointed out in the introduction, the "clandestine" lifestyle imposed on them has been characterized as "civil death" by the ECtHR. "European Court of Human Rights Rules in Case of Turkish Conscientious Objector," War Resisters' International, February 1, 2006, accessed April 2, 2013, <http://wri-irg.org/node/806>.

<sup>29</sup> For military regulations concerning the conscription of gays, see Alp Biricik, "Rotten Report and Reconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity in Turkey," in *Conscientious Objection*, ed. Çınar and Üsterci, 112-21.

the political agency of the COs is bracketed and their broader visibility in Turkey's public sphere is foreclosed.

But, what distinguished Aydemir's refusal from other forms of conscientious objection in Turkey was its Islamist character. He stated that it was his opposition to the secular character of the regime protected by the Turkish army that led him to become a CO. In his view, the secular Turkish regime prevented pious Muslims from living their lives in "total submission" to God as was required of them.<sup>30</sup> Propagating an "official religion" through the Diyanet, the state created "obedient Muslims" compatible with the secular structure. According to Aydemir, the Turkish army was a leading actor in this political project. And as a devout Muslim, who "refuses the official Turkish religion," it was impossible for Aydemir to become a soldier defending this system.<sup>31</sup> That would mean, "standing against" his deepest values.<sup>32</sup>

At first glance, Aydemir's religious stance, and in particular his ascription of sovereignty to God and his consequent rejection of secular democracy (along with the nation-state system), may appear consistent with the religious worldview associated with radical Islam. Turkish radical Islam emerged during the 1970s, and institutionalized in the 1980s in prominent groups such as the Turkish branch of Hezbollah when – consistent with the tenets of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis examined in the previous chapter – the state showed benign neglect towards Islamic mobilizations as potential bulwarks against communism. Turkish radical Islamists champion the violent overthrow

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<sup>30</sup> Author's interview with Enver Aydemir, July 3, 2011. Further quotations from Aydemir are from this interview unless otherwise indicated. All translations into English are the author's.

<sup>31</sup> "Enver Aydemir'in Mahkemedeki Savunması," Enver Aydemir Vicdanımızdır, accessed March 29, 2013, <http://enveraydemirinisiyatifi.blogspot.com/2010/06/enver-aydemirin-mahkemedeki-savunmasi.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., (accessed March 29, 2013).

of the secular regime and the establishment of an Islamic order based on the sharia.<sup>33</sup> The popularity of the army – the self-declared “guardian” of the secular republic in Turkey – is naturally low amongst this group.

However, despite some overlaps, Aydemir’s religiosity differs from radical Islamism. First, he rejects the violent methods of radical Islam, and refers to groups like Hezbollah as “perversions of Islamism.” Moreover, unlike the followers of such groups, Aydemir has relatively progressive views concerning gender equality, social diversity, and tolerance. While he favors the establishment of an Islamic system based on the Qur’an, he argues that this system should treat women and men as equals, and refrain from oppressing secularists, non-Muslims, and atheists. Finally, despite their hostile attitudes towards the military, radical Islamists never evidenced this opposition in the form of conscientious objection in Turkey.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Aydemir confronted the secular regime over the issue of conscription through his act of civil disobedience, and willingly submitted to the consequences of this resistance. These differences preclude the categorization of Aydemir’s religious outlook as radical Islamist.

In fact, the widespread disapproval of his conscientious objection in popular Islamic media in Turkey suggests that his religiosity, and the conscientious objection it inspired, does not accord with prevalent Islamist orientations represented in the public sphere, either. For instance, Turkey’s high-circulating newspaper *Zaman*, run by the powerful Fethullah Gülen movement, known for its emphasis on social service and Turkish-nationalist interpretation of Islam, presented Aydemir’s act as inauthentic and

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<sup>33</sup> For an analysis of Turkish radical Islam, see Ruşen Çakır, *Ayet ve Slogan* (Istanbul, Turkey: Metis Yayıncılık, 2002), and Derin Hizbullah (Istanbul, Turkey: Metis Yayınları, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> There may, of course, be “hidden” draft evaders, who are radical Islamists. The strategies available for hidden evaders include the postponing of recruitment by enrollment in institutions of higher education, or the obtaining of medical reports, indicating ineligibility to serve in the military.

unpatriotic.<sup>35</sup> While the Gülenist movement prides itself for its tolerant outlook and support for global integration, Islamist conscientious objection was nonetheless interpreted as detrimental to both religion and nationalism. For instance, according to the Islamist intellectual Ali Bulaç who writes for the outlet, conscientious objection was a foreign adaptation that is alien to, and unsupported by, Islam and Turkish culture.<sup>36</sup>

Commentators in the second most influential Islamic daily in Turkey, known for its statist outlook, *Yeni Safak*, similarly highlighted the religious inappropriateness of Aydermir's position concerning military service. Reiterating the official view concerning the intimate relationship between Islamic martial duties and compulsory conscription, the paper reminded its readers that it is an Islamic obligation to serve in defense of the nation, and criticized Aydemir for abandoning this holy duty.<sup>37</sup> Discussions in religious-

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<sup>35</sup> The Gülen Movement also known as *Cemaat* (Community) and *Hizmet* (Service), was founded by the Turkish Muslim scholar, Fethullah Gülen, currently residing in the U.S. With its mass schools network in Turkey and the Balkans, Central Asia, Europe, and North America, the movement has become one of the most influential Islamic transnational movements of the recent decades. Gülen's followers have established newspapers such as *Zaman*, television stations like *Samanyolu TV*, and magazines and academic journals. They are known to be strong within the police force and the judiciary. Until recently, the movement had close relations with the AKP. The movement's "penetration of the police and the judiciary allowed Erdoğan to confront the military and other key obstacles to the enlargement of his power." Claire Berlinski, "Anatomy of a Power Struggle," American Foreign Policy Council, accessed February 1, 2014, [http://www.afpc.org/publication\\_listings/viewArticle/1792](http://www.afpc.org/publication_listings/viewArticle/1792). But relations began to falter when prosecutors affiliated with the movement went after Hakan Fidan, the head of Turkish intelligence, in disapproval with his criticism of Israel and the peace negotiations conducted with the Kurdish movement. Erdoğan responded by threatening to close Gülen's after-school education network (*dershane*). The controversy culminated in the massive corruption investigation launched on 17 December 2013, implicating government officials, including the sons of three ministers, and hundreds of businessmen and others close to the government. Erdoğan blamed Gülen and its followers in the judiciary for operating as a "parallel state," and attempting to stage a coup against him. To block the investigation, he got rid of thousands within the police force suspected of being Gülenist, while reassigning new prosecutors to the investigation. Gülen denies the accusations, but he sharply criticized the government. For the corruption scandal, see Tim Arango, "Corruption Scandal Is Edging Near Turkish Premier," *New York Times*, December 26, 2013, accessed Feb. 1, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/26/world/europe/turkish-cabinet-members-resign.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Ali Bulaç, "Bedelliye ve Vicdani Red'de Red," *Zaman*, November 21, 2011, accessed Dec 31, 2014, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazar.do?jsessionid=D6F0595A67A41F7E6DA39483EA23B540?yazino=12044> 27.

<sup>37</sup> Hayrettin Karaman, "Reddedilen Askerlik mi Vicdan Mı?" *Yeni Safak*, December 8, 2011, accessed Feb 24, 2014,

nationalist blogs in social media were even more hostile. Anonymous commentators writing in such outlets condemned Aydemir's Islamist conscientious objection as a "deviant" expression, reflecting the degeneration of Islam in Turkey.<sup>38</sup>

This widespread opposition to conscientious objection supports the (previously raised) view that dominant Islamic groups in contemporary Turkey by and large endorse the official militarist-nationalist interpretation of Islam, constructed and disseminated as part of the nationalist reformation project examined in the previous chapter. And this seems to be the case despite the recent transformations in the civilian-military relations under Turkey's current moderately Islamist government led by the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - AKP).<sup>39</sup> An offshoot of the Islamist Welfare (*Refah*) Party that briefly ruled in coalition with secular parties before being ousted from power by the 1997 military intervention, AKP has been in power since 2002. Promoted as the progressive and liberal face of Islam, the party initially appealed not only to pious Muslims, but also to the right of the center and liberal segments of the population. Especially during its first term in government (2002-7), it championed global integration, economic development, and the liberal model of secularism, emphasizing a

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<http://yenisafak.com.tr/Yazarlar/?i=30097&y=HayrettinKaraman>; Hayrettin Karaman, "Red Vicdandan mı?" *Yeni Safak*, December 9, 2011, accessed Feb 24, 2014, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/Yazarlar/?t=09.12.2011&y=HayrettinKaraman>.

<sup>38</sup> Abdullah Kibritci, "Vicdani Ret Sapikligi, Vicdansiz Elit Aktivistler ve Devlet Hakkında," *Populist Kultur*, Jan 6, 2012, accessed Feb 24, 2014, <http://www.populistkultur.com/vicdani-ret-vicdansiz-elit-aktivist-devlet/>.

<sup>39</sup> Necmettin Erbakan is the founder of political Islam in Turkey. He founded "three "Islamic" parties that attempted to keep abreast of dissolution by court decrees, the National Order (est. 1970), National Salvation (est. 1972) and Welfare (Refah) Party (1983–98)." In these parties the inspiration was "capturing the state and using it to bring about changes in society by adopting the centralism of the Republic. The subsequently formed "Islamic" parties, Virtue (1997–2001), Felicity (2001–) and AKP, have abandoned this stance and adopted a position much more synchronized with the world economy and liberalism—a change which has often been stated to have proceeded since the 1990s." Şerif Mardin, "Turkish Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture and Reconstruction in Operational Codes," *Turkish Studies*, 6 (2005): 158-160.

tolerant public sphere and individual freedoms. However, the most important political achievement the party is credited for is the disempowerment of the Turkish military. Two government-backed investigations – Ergenekon and Sledgehammer – launched in response to the discovery of grenades in a retired military officer's house in 2007, implicated hundreds of current and retired officers in alleged attempts to stage coups against the AKP government.<sup>40</sup> While the controversy surrounding the investigations – with respect, in particular, to the use of suspicious and inconsistent evidence, long detentions without charge, leaking of information to the pro-AKP press, and the extension of the investigation's reach to civilian critics of the government – continues, the influence of the military on civilian politics seems to have indeed come to an end in Turkey.<sup>41</sup>

But, the disempowerment of the military did not lead to the democratization of the regime under AKP governance. On the contrary, as it sidelined the military and other challenges to its rule, the civilian government itself assumed an authoritarian face, making increasing use of the legal system and the police force to crush opposition. Tellingly, a growing emphasis on the religious symbolism of military matters and patriotism attended this transformation. For instance, while the celebration of Istanbul's conquest by the Ottoman Empire in 1453 reached unparalleled extravagance under AKP

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<sup>40</sup> Almost all of the Ergenekon suspects were released in March 2014. Cf. "Ergenekon suspects released amid chaos over legal authority between courts," *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 10, 2014, accessed April 24, 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ergenekon-suspects-released-amid-chaos-over-legal-authority-between-courts.aspx?PageID=238&NID=63385&NewsCatID=338>.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Gareth H. Jenkins, "Between Fact and Fantasy: Turkey's Ergenekon Investigation," *Silk Road Paper*, August 2009, accessed Jan 20, 2014, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/0908Ergenekon.pdf>. For a focus on the consequences of the trials for Turkish democracy, see Yaprak Gürsoy, "Turkish Public Attitudes Toward the Military and Ergenekon: Consequences for the Consolidation of Democracy," Working Paper No: 5 EU/5/2012, Istanbul Bilgi University, accessed Feb 20, 2014, [http://eu.bilgi.edu.tr/images/pictures/working\\_paper\\_5.pdf](http://eu.bilgi.edu.tr/images/pictures/working_paper_5.pdf).

rule, the party also inaugurated controversial projects aimed at reviving Ottoman-Islamic military grandeur – such as the demolishing of the Taksim Gezi Park in order to reconstruct the historic Ottoman Barracks in its place (including also a shopping mall), which ignited nationwide Gezi protests during the summer of 2013.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is adamant in highlighting the religious value of military duties and conscription. For instance, in a recent response to EU pressure on Turkey to legalize conscientious objection, he commented:

Conscientious objection has never been in our government's agenda. Military service is considered as a most sacred national duty. There is a reason that we call our soldiers *Mehmetçik*, it means "little Muhammad." We see military service as "the Hearth of Muhammad."<sup>43</sup>

The continuing emphasis on the religious value of military service, and its singling out as an authentic indicator of patriotism, suggests that AKP, to a large extent, endorsed the Turkish state tradition of using Islam to generate a pious and patriotic military ethos.<sup>44</sup> As the primary representative of mainstream political Islam in contemporary Turkey, its successive electoral victories (in the 2002, 2007, and 2011 general and recently 2014 local elections) demonstrate the apparent approval of Turkey's Muslims of this

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<sup>42</sup> Nation-wide anti-government protests followed the brutal police attack at a small group of nonviolent protestors at Gezi Park, protesting the plan to demolish it. Throughout the summer, the police used excessive violence against the protestors. While 5 people died, thousands were injured. Cf. Aslı Iğsız, "Brand Turkey and the Gezi Protests: Authoritarianism, Law, and Neoliberalism," *Jadaliyya*, July 12, 2013, accessed Jan 31, 2014, [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12907/brand-turkey-and-the-gezi-protests\\_authoritarianism](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12907/brand-turkey-and-the-gezi-protests_authoritarianism); "Turkey accused of gross human rights violations in Gezi Park protests," Amnesty International, October 2, 2013, accessed Jan 31, 2013, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/turkey-accused-gross-human-rights-violations-gezi-park-protests-2013-10-02>.

<sup>43</sup> "Başbakan Erdoğan'dan vicdani ret açıklaması," *Hürriyet*, November 22, 2011, accessed Jan 31, 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/19303120.asp>.

<sup>44</sup> However, AKP's discourse with respect to the peace process launched in 2013 seems to diverge from this trend. Notions of religious unity and Muslim brotherhood have been utilized by the government during the period of peace talks with the PKK. While the final outcome of these talks and whether the government will continue to use this discourse remain to be seen, it is still important to note this important development.

endorsement. Thus, rather than initiate a critical reevaluation of the instrumental uses of religion by the state, the AKP government continues to use Islamic discourses to militarize nationalist sentiments, and thus helps sustain the popular prestige of military service.

Set against this background, it is clear that Aydemir's religious outlook, and the Islamist conscientious objection it inspired, is an original religious interpretation that remains marginal to the prevalent formulations of Islam and Islamic duties in contemporary Turkey (and in particular the currently dominant outlook of AKP). This claim is further supported by the fact that the only support Aydemir received from Turkey's Islamic public sphere following his objection came from other small and marginal Islamic groups. Amongst these groups that supported Aydemir and Islamist conscientious objection, perhaps the most prominent was a small group known as Anti-capitalist Muslims (*Antikapitalist Müslümanlar*). Founded by a group of young Muslims based in Istanbul, Anti-capitalist Muslims follow the teaching of a prolific Islamist intellectual and author Ihsan Eliaçık, who professes a modernist interpretation of Islam, influenced by socialism and democratic political theory.<sup>45</sup> Another group that publicly endorsed Islamist conscientious objection was Free Declaration (*Hür Beyan*). Also founded by a small group of Muslim university students, this group was also known for its anti-authoritarian and egalitarian interpretations of Islam, especially with respect to gender rights and the rights of Muslim women.

Although these groups remain marginal, it is nonetheless important to note that the emergent Islamist conscientious objection and the existence of groups like Anti-

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<sup>45</sup> Author's interview with Ihsan Eliaçık on January 10, 2012. Eliaçık's books include *Adalet Devleti* (Istanbul, Turkey: Insa Yayinlari, 2011), and *Sosyal Islam* (Istanbul, Turkey: Insa Yayinlari, 2011).



capitalist Muslims demonstrate the increasing diversity in religious worldviews and orientations in contemporary Turkey. Challenging the official interpretation of religion that aims to rally support for state interests and generate obedient dispositions, these oppositional groups deploy the new technologies and networks of communication to spread their message and build connections with other social actors. While the long-term consequences of these developments remain to be seen, the emergent Islamist conscientious objection raises an urgent question with respect to our inquiry in this dissertation: How exactly does this new resistance relate to, and challenge, the religious valuation of military obligations and sacrifice (examined in the previous chapter) in Turkey? And what are the broader consequences of this resistance? To answer these questions, I now turn to an ethnographic examination of Islamist conscientious objection.

### **Islamist Conscientious Objection**

Aydemir's objection inspired other Muslims. Since 2007, dozens of other citizens declared conscientious objection on Islamic grounds in Turkey,<sup>46</sup> while hundreds of practicing Muslims have become active members of the CO-rights movement – a development that had not been anticipated by the secular activists who started the CO rights struggle in Turkey in the early 1990s.<sup>47</sup> As we shall see, Islamists COs come from different backgrounds and propose diverse interpretations of Islam. While the majority are men, there are also four women amongst them. However, the overlaps in their critique

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<sup>46</sup> Before Turkey, there has not been an Islamist conscientious objection struggle in the Middle East, or other Muslim majority countries. Within the Middle East, COs emerged only in Egypt in 2012. These 2 Egyptian COs grounded their refusal to serve on secular political convictions. Cf. "Egypt: New conscientious objectors," War Resisters' International, May 1 2012, accessed Feb., 7, 2014, <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/15116>.

<sup>47</sup> This point was routinely made in my conversations with the anarchists and antimilitarists that were the dominant group within the CO movement during the 1990s.

of Turkish militarism and the Islamic concepts integrated within the discourses of nationalism and official religion enable the treatment of Islamists COs, and their ideas, as a relatively cohesive group. Problematizing the nationalist and militarist interpretations of Islam (as they relate to military service in particular), Islamic conscientious objection has thus generated a new critical religious discourse concerning the military obligations of citizens and sacrifice in Turkey.

In the rest of this section, I will examine the theoretical criticisms Islamist conscientious objection raises with respect to Turkey's deployment and interpretation of Islamic concepts and values to legitimize conscription and sacrifice. I will focus in particular on COs' critique of jihad and martyrdom, two prominent religious idioms conventionally invoked with respect to military service in Turkey. Emphasizing the theoretical contradictions involved in the nationalist and militarist interpretations offered for jihad and martyrdom, Islamist COs offer competing analyses that transform these idioms into oppositional discourses, aiming to dissuade Muslims from serving, and seeking martyrdom, in the Turkish army. As we shall see, in their critical rendering, jihad and martyrdom hinder, not enable, the theological legitimation of the authority of the Turkish state and its military. As such, Islamist conscientious objection displays not only the rich diversity of religious sensibilities, defying characterizations of a homogenous "Turkish Islam," but also the apparent failure of the politico-theological solution the modern state sought to resolve the problems concerning obligation and sacrifice tainting contractual politics – a point I will come back to at the end of the discussion of the COs' critique.

To begin let us turn to Islamist conscientious objection's critical re-signification of the concept of jihad. The first substantial criticism COs raise concerns the deployment of this concept with respect to the military obligations of Turkish citizens. Islamist COs claim that this usage is neither appropriate nor legitimate from an Islamic point of view. They offer several reasons to support this claim. For instance, without directly engaging with the theological complexities and broader history of the concept of jihad and its application, Aydemir flatly rejects the possibility that a secular state, wherein sharia is not practiced can be an agent of jihad. Because Turkey is a democratic country, he argues, its laws and governing institutions conform to "the will of the people," rather than "God's will transmitted through the Qur'an." This suggests that it is a theoretical contradiction to associate the practices of the Turkish state, including its warfare, with religious values.

This view is supported by Muhammed Serdar Delice, who is one of the first COs after Aydemir who grounded his refusal to serve on his Islamic faith. Delice declared his conscientious objection in March 2010, after serving in the army as part of his compulsory conscription for five months.<sup>48</sup> Defining himself as a devout Muslim and a former Turkish nationalist, he admits that he enthusiastically joined the barracks when he was first called to serve. Having been raised in an Islamist and nationalist family, he learnt (consistent with the narrative popularized by official discourse) that it was his patriotic and religious obligation to serve in the army, and he was eager to fulfill this sacred duty. But, this initial enthusiasm for soldiering began to fade as he encountered what he calls the "moral degeneration" in the army. The routine beating and humiliation of junior conscripts by their seniors and commanders – a well-reported but seemingly

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<sup>48</sup> The following depiction of Delice's story, and the quotations from him are based upon the author's interview with Muhammed Serdar Delice on July 2, 2011.

irresolvable problem in military service – disagreed with Delice’s moral sensibilities.<sup>49</sup> But most importantly, Delice was distressed by the “disrespectful” attitude towards his religiosity in his unit. What humiliated him most and eventually led to his desertion was the desecration of his Qur’an by a senior officer who threw it out of the window. This incident made clear to Delice that the popular Islamic valuation of the army does not sit well with the actual practices of military officers and the general ethos within the barracks. After this incident, Delice decided to discontinue his service, and declared his conscientious objection – “disillusioned with the army’s claim to a sacred status.”

Reiterating Aydemir’s emphasis on the theoretical inconsistencies attending the invocation of the notion of jihad with respect to the army of a secular state, Delice emphasizes that even if one were to ignore this crucial fact, other conditions should exist to render claims to jihad legitimate. He elaborates: “There are two kinds of jihad – the “minor jihad” (*qital*), which involves the obligation to “fight against oppression and to relieve the suffering of the Islamic community,” as distinguished from “the greatest jihad” (*jihad an-nafs*), Muslims’ struggle against their passions and weaknesses.”<sup>50</sup> While implying that pacifism is not legitimate in Islam,<sup>51</sup> this means that only an army that fights in defense of the *umma*, the supra-national community of faith, can be a legitimate agent of “the minor jihad.” Criticizing the “official religion’s” attempt to downplay the

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Mehmet Ali Birand, *Shirts of Steel: An Anatomy of the Turkish Armed Forces* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1991). For regular updates concerning the mistreatment of conscripts and violation of rights in the barracks, see the website Asker Hakları <http://www.askerhaklari.com/>.

<sup>50</sup> Author’s interview with Muhammed Serdar Delice, July 2, 2011. All further quotations from Delice are from this interview. Delice did not cite a specific source for this interpretation of jihad. For a description of the distinctions between the two forms of jihad, see Muhammad Asad trans. and ed., *The Message of the Qur’an* (Dar Al-Andalus: Gibraltar, 1980). All further references to and quotations from the Qur’an are from Muhammad Asad’s translation. Any of the 114 sections of the Qur’an is called *surah*. Each *surah* has a different number of *ayah*, verses. In quotations, the number of the *surah* is followed by the number of the *ayah*, as in: (1:14).

<sup>51</sup> Thus, like the Kurdish CO Initiative, Islamist COs oppose pacifism, which would indicate a refusal of the Islamic obligation of “minor jihad.”

prominence of transnational obligations of Muslims in favor of a “Turkified Islam” – a strategic reconstruction undertaken during the Turkish reformation, which was analyzed in the previous chapter – Islamist conscientious objection hereby emphasizes the supranational Islamic identity and attachments, and its priority over any nationalist allegiance. Thus, as Delice pointed out, as the army of a nation-state, the Turkish army cannot defend the interests of the *umma*, and as such, fighting in it would not fulfill the obligations of jihad.

More poignantly, Delice claims that Turkey’s involvement in the systematic oppression of, and warfare against, another Muslim community, the Kurds, decidedly violates the requirements of jihad. Citing the Qur’an in support of this claim, he argues that “it is prohibited in Islam to kill other Muslims or wage jihad against them:”

It is not conceivable that a believer should slay another believer, unless it be by mistake (4: 92). But whoever deliberately slays another believer, his requital shall be Hell, therein to abide; and God will condemn him, and will reject him, and will prepare for him awesome suffering (4: 93).

By portraying its military operations as religiously sanctioned, Turkey incites Muslims to bear arms against “fellow Muslims,” and thereby engage in acts that are transgressive of Islamic duty. This is a “misuse” of Islamic values, and a way of “manipulating” the Muslim public. Unfortunately, Delice thinks that the Turkish state has been highly successful in this form of manipulation, and regrets his own upbringing, which taught him “to see the Kurds as potential traitors to the nation rather than Muslim brothers.” With his conscientious objection, he now hopes to raise awareness amongst Turkey’s Muslims about the sacrilegious aspects of “oppressing” and “fighting against” the Kurds.

The criticism of the nationalist “misuse” of the concept of jihad in reference to the war between the Turkish army and the PKK is the cornerstone of the conscientious objection of another Muslim Yusuf. Yusuf attended a Gülenist private school in Istanbul as part of his secondary and high school education. During this time, he lived in a school dormitory run by this influential community. In this environment, his education was based upon Fethullah Gülen’s teaching, collected in 55 books known as *Pirlanta Serisi* (Diamond Series). While appreciating Gülen’s stress on religious tolerance, service for the community (especially for the poor and the needy), and global dialogue, Yusuf grew uncomfortable with the nationalist and statist undertones of Gülenist teaching. He thus began to criticize in the classrooms and after-school study hours his educators’ emphasis on the sacredness of the state and citizens’ duties towards it. Yusuf’s own reading and interpretation of the Qur’an, which was discouraged by his teachers on the ground that “he was not qualified to interpret this difficult text,” suggested that nationalist wars are not justifiable in Islam. These disagreements with the nationalist and statist grounds of Gülenist teaching led to a search for other social networks, and through the social media he met a group of anarchist high-school students based in Istanbul and involved in the CO movement. His initiation into this new group introduced Yusuf to the philosophy and practice of anarchism and war resistance. While his socialization in this new environment did not change his self-identification as a Muslim, it did inspire a synthesis between his individual and antiauthoritarian interpretation of the Qu’ran and anarchism. At the end, in the last year of high school – before he received his draft call – Yusuf declared his conscientious objection as an “anarchist Muslim.”

As most other Islamist COs, Yusuf condemns Turkey's war against the Kurdish guerilla as "a dirty war," dressed in a fake Islamic overcoat.<sup>52</sup> He argues that by attributing religious values to its nationalist military operations, the Turkish state "anesthetizes (*narkozlamak*) people so that "they obey unconditionally." Rather than comply with this deception, he argues, Turkish Muslims should remember the message of "the Al-Fatiha *surah*":

"Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone we turn for aid."(1:5)

Endorsing this message, Yusuf now pledges to disobey all authoritarian obligations that violate this message – whether they are imposed by the state or other "so-called religious authorities." His conscientious objection as an anarchist Muslim is intended also to represent the possibility of uniting Islamic faith and anarchism in this struggle.

A similar message of defiance coupled with a warning about the manipulative usages of religious rhetoric in Turkish nationalist discourses is transmitted through Muhammed Cihad Saatçioğlu's conscientious objection.<sup>53</sup> Cihad is the son of a prominent Muslim activist, Hüda Kaya, who, along with her three daughters, shockingly faced the death penalty for her advocacy of freedom for the headscarf during the secularist crackdown following the 28 February 1997 military intervention in Turkey – undertaken against the coalition government headed by Necmettin Erbakan's Islamist Welfare Party.<sup>54</sup> While Kaya and her daughters were eventually acquitted of the

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<sup>52</sup> Author's interview with Yusuf, on January 5, 2012. All further quotations from Yusuf are from this interview. All translations into English are the author's.

<sup>53</sup> Author's interview with Saatçioğlu in December 2013. All further quotations from Saatçioğlu are from this interview. All translations into English are the author's.

<sup>54</sup> Rather than violently overthrowing the government and resuming power itself (as it had done twice in the past: in 1960 and 1980), this time the army asked the government to implement a series of secularist measures "designed to nullify the supposed Islamization of Turkey" under the leadership of the Welfare Party, and to "fortify the secular system." Umit Cizre & Menderes Çınar, "Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102 (2003): 309.

disproportionate charge of conspiring against the secular regime, their imprisonment and struggle became the symbol of the suppression of Islamic identities during the several years following the 1997 intervention (until the rise of AKP in 2002).

Unsurprisingly, growing in this activist family, Cihad was politicized at quite an early age. He was only 13 years old when his mother and sisters first went into jail. When the period of radical secularism came to an end in 2002 with the rise of the moderately Islamist AKP and the re-establishment of a relative freedom in civil society, Cihad himself became a political activist. While a devout Muslim, his political sensibilities were firmly on the left. In his early 20s he joined the socialist workers' party based in Istanbul, Devrimci Sosyalist İşçi Partisi (DSIP) (Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party), also known for its support for the Kurdish independence movement. His activism within the party resulted in accusations of support for Kurdish terrorism, and in fact, he was briefly imprisoned under this charge in 2011.<sup>55</sup> But he was soon acquitted of all the charges raised against him, and was released. Upon his release, he declared his conscientious objection in 2012 along with his friend Abdulkadir on Islamic grounds.

Consistent with the above highlighted arguments of other Islamist COs, Cihad rejects the nationalist interpretation of jihad and Islamic obligations. He stresses that his

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As Cizre and Çınar noted although the immediate consequence of the army's ultimatum was the forced resignation of the government, the intervention had far reaching consequences. Reflecting the army's decision to abandon the Turkish Islamic synthesis – which, as was noted in the previous chapter, it supported following the 1980s coup – and to “refashion Turkey's political landscape” along strict secularist lines, the 1997 intervention resulted in the implementation of policies that further polarized the society, particularly with respect to Islamic social identities and practice. As has been studied in detail, the issue of women's right to wear the headscarf in educational facilities and public offices was perhaps the most dramatic representation of this polarization. Secularist political and civil society institutions and Islamic social rights and pro-democracy advocates ran opposing campaigns, turning the headscarf issue, as Alev Çınar observed, into a symbolic venue for the renegotiation of the character of secularism and gender relations and democracy in Turkey. For studies focusing on this point see especially Alev Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern*; Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*.

<sup>55</sup> Nilay Vardar, “Muhammed'i Serbest Bırakın,” *Bianet*, September 12, 2011, accessed Jan 20, 2014, <http://bianet.org/bianet/ifade-ozgurlugu/132655-muhammed-i-serbest-birakin>.



“understanding and practice of Islam” is fundamentally different than “the official religion that preaches absolute obedience to the Turkish state.” Like Muhammed Serdar Delice, he also offers the prohibition against the killing of other Muslims in Islam as a factor in discrediting the military’s claim to being an agent of holy warfare. Because it “sheds the blood of Muslim brothers,” it would be the desecration of religious values to participate in the operations of the Turkish military, not, as it is claimed in nationalist discourses, the fulfillment of the obligations of jihad. For Cihad, Islamic conscientious objection thus becomes not only the refusal to commit sacrilegious acts – or as he put it, to “become accomplices in the murderous practices of the nation-state” – but also “joining the path of peace,” which is “what Islam means and what Islamic faith requires,” resulting in the complete reversal of the official interpretation (that it is an Islamic obligation to serve in the Turkish army).

In addition to the above summarized points concerning the requirements that must be fulfilled for aspirations to jihad to be valid – in particular, governance based on the rule of sharia, the warring party’s commitment to the defense of the wellbeing and interests of the *umma* (not the nation), and most importantly, the upholding of the Islamic injunction against the killing of other Muslims –, Islamist COs highlight other features of the Turkish military that preclude its association with jihad. For instance, according to Mehmet Lütfü Özdemir the hierarchical and permanent structure of the Turkish army is a major problem. Özdemir declared his conscientious objection on Islamic grounds in 2011. He is ethnically Kurdish and was raised in an Islamist family in the South-eastern city of Adana. After finishing high school, he moved to Istanbul. While writing poetry and short stories for small journals, he briefly worked as a journalist too. During this period he got

involved in the group Anti-capitalist Muslims and became a follower of Ihsan Eliaçık, while also beginning to work in the publishing house run by Eliaçık and his followers. Thus, the theoretical grounding of his conscientious objection involves not only the Qur'an and other original Islamic texts, but also Eliaçık's socialist-leaning interpretation of Islam. Importantly, Özdemir also invokes non-Islamic sources such as Christian pacifism and theories of nonviolent resistance developed by Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King in his critique. While these theories are not systematically engaged with, they seem to be randomly integrated within Özdemir's reading of Islamic texts and his interpretations of Islamic teachings concerning authority, hierarchy, justice and sacrifice.

The emphasis on the social egalitarianism of Islam, and the limits this egalitarian outlook places upon the use of violence constitutes an important part of Özdemir's critique of the army. Referring to the Prophet Muhammad's own military practices, he claims that hierarchical and permanent military organizations are not legitimate in Islam: "During the Prophet's time the only allowable military mobilization was voluntary militias." Participants were treated as "interchangeable equals" in these militias and upon the completion of their task they immediately dissolved to prevent the emergence of a permanent hierarchy. This precedent suggests that as a standing army, the Turkish army cannot be an agent of holy warfare.

Moreover, given Islam's emphasis on voluntarism, for Özdemir, the compulsory character of military service in Turkey hinders an association with jihad. Özdemir agrees with the explanation that Aydemir also offered: that jihad is "voluntary submission to God's cause," and "nobody, not even the Prophet himself" has "the right to impose on anyone an obligation to fight:

At most, he [the Prophet] can encourage me to participate in jihad, but he cannot force this on me, or punish me if I disobey.

Building upon this point, Özdemir further suggests that the latter practice (forcing an individual to participate in jihad) would be equivalent to treating someone as a slave.<sup>56</sup> Referring to an anecdote narrated in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, one of the six canonical *hadith* collections of Sunni Islam, he compares his resolve to disobey the draft to the resolve of the enslaved African Bilal-i Habesi – one of the first seven converts to Islam –, who kept his religion despite torture by Mecca’s pagan notables. Özdemir insists that Muslims should follow the example of Bilal-i Habesi in Turkey, and oppose conscription that denies them individual will and choice.

Reflecting the influence of socialism and the group he is involved in (Anticapitalist Muslims) on his interpretation of Islam, Özdemir also voices anti-capitalist values in his criticism:

Like all other armies, the Turkish military was established to protect socio-economic relations of domination. Political ideas such as democracy, citizenship, and security are myths manufactured to embellish this ugly truth. To get rid of militarism, we must first destroy this system of accumulation that encloses our lands and minds. It is so written in the Qur’an, but Turkish translations do not properly render the message: ‘God and his Prophet are at war against those who do not give up outstanding gains from usury’ (2: 279). The Prophet and his companions fought against those who accumulated power and wealth, and subordinated others. If this message of Islam were to be properly understood,

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<sup>56</sup> Author’s interview with Mehmet Lütfü Özdemir, December 27, 2011. All further quotations from Özdemir are from this interview. All translations into English are the author’s.

Muslim youth in this country would burn down banks wherever they see them, not kill and die for this system, and its military.

From this perspective, the virtual protection of the capitalist economy by the Turkish army makes military service in that country a violation, not a fulfillment, of the obligations related to jihad.

All in all, according to Islamist COs, neither the sanctioning of the Turkish army as the agent of jihad, nor the characterization of military service as holy duty rests on valid Islamic foundations. Their critique demonstrates the theoretical inconsistencies and normative transgressions attending the invocation of jihad with respect to conscription. But perhaps more importantly, this critique entails a radical re-configuration of the religious elements associated with jihad that are integrated within the nationalist and militaristic discourses in Turkey. From a theoretical perspective, this re-configuration results in the discursive dismantling of the logic and objectives of political theology, understood here as Turkey's attempt to provide theological legitimation for political institutions such as universal conscription, and thereby provide a strong affective foundation for obedience and obligation. At the end of Islamic COs' critical re-organization of the values and meanings related to the concept of jihad, military service in the Turkish army appears not as the fulfillment but, on the contrary, as the violation of Islamic martial obligations. Put differently, their competing interpretation transforms jihad into an oppositional discourse that provokes disobedience to the state and refusal to serve.

The other fundamental religious idiom Islamist COs' critical interpretive efforts are directed at is martyrdom (*shahadet*). While accepting that God promises blessings for

those who have been martyred on behalf of Islam, COs object to the use of this religious idiom with respect to death while serving in the Turkish military. First, they point out that the majority of these deaths have occurred in the military operations undertaken against the Kurdish guerilla. As we have seen, Islamist COs consider these operations religiously illegitimate, involving acts prohibited by Islam. As Delice put it:

The Kurd in the Southeast is a Muslim, and so am I. He shouts at me the battle cry, ‘Allah, Allah’; and I shout the same. It is forbidden (*haraam*) to shed the blood of another Muslim in the Qur’an. How could one talk about martyrdom when committing *haraam* acts?

In this recasting, fallen soldiers of the Turkish army appear as tragic characters, forced to commit sacrilegious acts, rather than pious heroes courageously giving their lives for the nation, as they are conventionally portrayed in official and popular nationalist discourses in Turkey.

Another CO, Inan Mayıs Aru makes a similar point by referring to the fallen conscripts as “sacrificial victims of national sovereignty.”<sup>57</sup> Mayıs was raised in a secular leftist family. His parents were active in the socialist student movement of the 1970s. After the 1980s coup, they settled down in a small town near the western city of Çanakkale as teachers. During his secondary and high school education, Mayıs developed a deep interest in eastern religions and philosophy, especially Buddhism. But, when he moved to Izmir to study sociology in the university, he was drawn mainly to anarchism. It is also in this city, which had been the center of antimilitarist activism in Turkey up until the early 2000s that he became involved in CO rights movement. Studying the

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<sup>57</sup> Author’s interview with Inan Mayıs Aru, July 5, 2011. All further quotations from Aru are from this interview. All translations into English are the author’s.

history and practices of antimilitarism and working together with the members of the antimilitarist movement in Izmir, he decided that one day he would also declare his conscientious objection.

Eventually, Mayıs left university and moved to Istanbul. While continuing antimilitarist activism here, he also began to study Islamic theology and in particular Sufism – mystical dimension of Islamic faith, originally developed as a reaction against orthodox formalism. While not becoming a member of a Sufi sect, he was increasingly influenced by the antiauthoritarianism and antimaterialism of this mystical religious orientation, especially the teaching of Shaykh Bedreddin – the prominent Sufi theologian who led a popular revolt against the Ottoman Empire in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Bringing together this mystic Islamic tradition with his anarchist and antimilitarist political stance, he finally declared his conscientious objection in 2008 at the mausoleum of Sheikh Bedreddin in Istanbul, reciting a poem by Bedreddin.

In his criticism, Mayıs focuses especially on the pragmatic political uses made of the martyrdom discourse in the modern period. Although this usage preceded the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979, he suggests that Ali Shariati's re-codification of martyrdom – which literally means bearing witness to God's greatness (*shahadet* in Arabic)– as activism and death in the struggle against social injustice, created and imposed by the state was highly influential in this development:

Shariati argued: 'In the permanent battle of history – everywhere and every place, all fields are Karbala, all months are Moharram, all days are Ashura.'<sup>58</sup> Well, yes, this holds a valuable historical message for me as a Muslim, but once you turn

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58 The reference is to The Battle of Karbala, which took place on the 10th of the first month called Moharram, in year 61 of the Islamic calendar (October 10, 680). The Battle took place in Karbala, located in present day Iraq. Muhammad's grandson Husain ibn Ali was martyred in the Battle.

this formulation into a culture of sacrifice, you create a very problematic discourse. Historical incidents become myths, and these myths are used to orient people towards nationalistic ends. The notion of martyrdom is today used simply to prolong the continuity of national armies and states. Interpreted this way, it is more compatible with nationalism than religion.

If ascriptions of martyrdom aim to put religious devotion to the service of nationalism, and thus generate a nationalist “culture of sacrifice” – as Mayıs claims to be the case in Turkey –, such ascription are Islamically unjustified. This suggests that it is wrong to refer to the soldiers who have been “sacrificed” in the nationalist wars pursued by the Turkish army as martyrs. As Mayıs implies, their death “bears witness” not to the greatness of God, but to the power of the national sovereign.

The nationalist “misinterpretation” and “misuse” of Islamic martyrdom is further problematized by the first Muslim women who declared her conscientious objection for Islamic reasons, Nebiye Arı.<sup>59</sup> Growing up in an Islamist family in the central Anatolian city of Konya – known as the most pious city of Turkey –, Nebiye heard about conscientious objection for the first time after Enver Aydemir’s declaration. On social media, she began to read about the history of conscientious objection in the world as well as the brief history of Turkey’s conscientious objection struggle (beginning in the early 1990s). Aydemir’s Islamist objection seemed so novel, yet also “so natural” to Nebiye. She wondered why there has not been other Islamist COs before Aydemir. During her research, she also learnt that there are many women COs in Turkey whose objection brought focus on the connection between militarized gender roles, conscription, and war.

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<sup>59</sup> Author’s interviews with Arı, June 2012 and July 2013. All further quotations from Arı are from this interview. All translations into English are the author’s. While there are only 4 Muslim women COs, there are approximately 50 women CO within the broader CO movement.

But unlike Nebiye, all the women COs were secular feminists. Still, she found herself increasingly more interested in this act of civil disobedience, and contemplated declaring her own objection at some point.

After high school, she moved to Istanbul to study theology. In Istanbul, she began to attend the meetings of the Platform for Conscientious Objection, and the protests and CO declarations the group organized. During this period, she also got involved in the small Islamic group *Hür Beyan* (Free Declaration). Collaborating with Anticapitalist Muslims, *Hür Beyan* emphasized the rights of Muslim women and organized events against violence against women.

In 2011, Nebiye declared her conscientious objection. Her objection, she emphasized, was an act of “seeking refuge from nationalism and militarism in God’s sovereignty.” In her criticism, she emphasizes that the martyrdom discourse in Turkey reflects a “profound contradiction” by validating a secular army and sustaining “the power of an unjust state” – unjust, she claims, not only because it violates Muslims’ rights but also that of the Kurds. But more poignantly, Nebiye argues that the martyrdom discourse helps perpetuate a nationalist gender division by ascribing to women the duty of “obedient” and “patriotic motherhood.” In this nationalist account, women’s duty and purpose is to raise their sons as soldiers, and teach them the value of martyrdom. But:

As a Muslim women, I refuse to participate in this role crafted for me, and do not want to sacrifice the men I love, or my children, for the dirty war in the Southeast.



Problematizing the role martyrdom discourse plays in enlisting the support of pious women in this way, Nebiye hereby lends an important Islamic voice to Turkey's feminists' and women COs' struggle against militarism and its gendered codification.

In sum, and consistent with their approach to the deployment of the concept of jihad with respect to conscription, Islamist COs oppose Turkey's nationalistic valuation of death in military service as Islamic martyrdom. In addition to highlighting the inconstancies attending the attribution of martyrdom to those who lose their lives in a national army that violates the rights and well being of another Muslim community, their competing re-interpretations problematize the sacrificial logic attending the political theology informing this installment. That is, while Turkey projects military sacrifice as an instance of heroic piety that would bring blessings in afterlife, and hereby attributes a transcendent value and meaning to the mortal risks involved in military service, COs' theoretical critique emphasizes the tragic character of death in the military. In their rendering, this kind of sacrificial death is not martyrdom, but a tragic consequence of an illegitimate and sacrilegious obligation imposed on people by the nation state. Put differently, these young men are not martyrs, but "victims" who are sacrificed for unjust cause.

Importantly, while dismantling the theoretical associations made between sacrifice, piety, and heroism in Turkish politico-theological valuation of death in the military, Islamist COs' critique involves a competing re-organization of the associated religious norms that facilitates resistance to (not compliance with) the obligations involving the risk of sacrifice. Putting emphasis on the basic meaning of *shahadet* in Islam – witnessing God's greatness and total sovereignty over the individual and her

conscience – COs claim that martyrdom would best be sought through disobeying authorities that “rival God” – a sin, *shirk*,<sup>60</sup> in Islam. As Aydemir pointed out, compulsory conscription is a perfect example of the state’s rivalry with God’s authority “over matters of life and death.” This implies that martyrdom might be achieved not by risking death in the Turkish army, but by refusing to serve in worldly institutions that command violence and demand sacrifice – that is, through conscientious objection.

In sum, profoundly transforming the hegemonic politico-theological relation between martyrdom and military sacrifice in the Turkish context, Islamist COs’ critique introduces a rival logic, and as such a rival configuration of religion’s relationship to political practice. Their competing politico-theological imaginary grounds martyrdom not on killing and dying for the Turkish state – or for Islam for that matter – but, importantly, on conscientious resistance to compulsory obligations imposed on Muslims, especially those involving sacrificial violence.

### **Political Theology and its Predicaments**

Several broader theoretical issues follow from Islamist COs’ critical resistance against Turkey’s attempt to generate obedience and sacrifice through a systematic invocation of theological paradigms. As the previous chapters have argued, Turkey was led to pursue this strategy in large part to redeem the affective deficit tainting modern politics based on the ideals of rational interest and self-preservation. As we have seen, to supplement political authority with the emotive resources capable of commanding strong passions and attachments, the Turkish republic thus constructed a new civil religion

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<sup>60</sup> *Shirk* means the ascription of divine qualities to others beside God in the Qur’an, and is said to be an “unforgivable” sin until the sinner repents. Asad, *The Message*, 113.

which included the combined pursuit of (a) the strategy of introducing new grounds of transcendence and affect through the sacralization of the state and republican institutions (as emphasized by the civic republican tradition and in particular Rousseau) (b) the Hobbesian strategy of re-constructing traditional religion so that it comes to support nationalist politics.

Islamist conscientious objection and its theoretical critique challenge the politico-theological logic and objectives of this proposed solution. Broadly put, political theology is here understood not only as the mode of political thinking and imaginary, emphasizing the necessary connections between the theological and the political and the religious dimensions of sovereignty and authority – as highlighted in its classical formulations such as in Carl Schmitt’s work – but, more broadly, as the complicated and contentious re-signification and restructuring of the political sphere on the basis of this specific mode of thinking/imaginary.<sup>61</sup> Opposing the nationalistic and militaristic hermeneutics within which religious meaning and value is restricted by the Turkish civil religion, Islamist COs dismantle the elements of this disciplinary formation. As we have seen with respect to the theological concepts of jihad and martyrdom, they criticize the theoretical associations made between the passions and virtues relating to these theological concepts – such as the association of heroism and piety with death in the military – and propose alternative associations. At the end of their critical re-interpretations, these theological concepts are transformed into oppositional discourses and motives that legitimize and inspire resistance to the secular sovereign – not obedience and sacrifice. As such, their

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<sup>61</sup> For a succinct and perceptive summary of influential engagements and renderings of political theology, see Victoria Kahn, *The Future of Illusion: Political Theology and Early Modern Texts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 1-23.

critique embodies the possibility of a different (and insurgent) form of politics that draws upon the theological concepts empowered by the state but put to radically different uses.

From a broader theoretical perspective, this shows, first, that conceived as a disciplinary project involving the attempt to transform religion into a political instrument that assists secular politics, political theology is necessarily incomplete and inconclusive.<sup>62</sup> As Islamist COs' critique demonstrates, religious traditions are too rich and dynamic to be completely bound by such authoritarian mastery and design. The boundaries established by particular religio-political renderings could be breached, and then re-formed in different ways. In the Turkish context this took the form of the invocation of alternative religious traditions (Sufism) to resist the disciplinary relation imposed by the state, as well as original syntheses between Islamic values and other systems of thinking such as anarchism and anti-capitalism. Regardless of the specific form this contestation may take, the implication is that the attempt to discipline religious imaginaries so that they become instruments of a particular form of politics can be neither consistently maintained nor forestall the possibility of their contestation.

But perhaps more importantly, the COs' critique shows that even after the theological revaluation of state policies and institutions, sacrifice may remain as a vexing problem in modern politics. As we have seen, Islamist COs' critical resistance dismantled the sacrificial logic of Turkish civil religion involving a militarist and nationalist interpretation of Islam. Their competing re-significations of jihad and martyrdom resulted in the transformation of the sacrificial meaning and impact of the theological concepts incorporated within, and popularized by, the discourses of civil religion, into oppositional

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<sup>62</sup> This is, as Victoria Kahn has noted, the gist of the Machievellian, and one might also add, to a large extent, the conventional Hobbesian and the Rousseauian rendering of political theology. Kahn, *The Future*, 145-6.

discourses that render military service and sacrifice sacrilegious and tragic transgressions of Islamic values and norms. Illustrating the possibility of such critical interventions into the sacrificial normativity of political theology, Islamist conscientious objection hereby shows that the sacrificial paradox appears to survive the theological valuation of politics, perhaps not uninjured but certainly alive.

### **Conclusion:**

In this chapter, we have seen that despite the overall popularity of military service, there has also been a small but continuing conscientious objection movement in Turkey since the early 1990s. Emerging as a secular anti-war movement influenced primarily by anarchism, Turkey's conscientious objection movement evolved to include other forms of ethical, political, and religious convictions. Amongst these were feminism, socialism, Kurdish rights activism, religious pacifism (Jehovah's Witnesses) and recently an opposition to the draft based on Islamic convictions. Focusing on Islamist conscientious objection, the chapter has discussed how this new form of resistance began to challenge the religious valuation of military service in Turkey – a valuation that (as the previous chapter has shown) the modern Turkish state has systematically cultivated since its founding, and one that has a lot to do with the remarkable popularity of conscription in that country.

Opposing the nationalist and militarist interpretations of jihad and martyrdom, deployed to legitimize conscription and military sacrifice, Islamist COs offer competing interpretations for these religious idioms. With respect to the notion of jihad, they highlight the theoretical contradictions involved in the secular Turkish state's claim to

holy warfare with respect to its conscript army. Their interpretations of Islam suggest that certain requirements must be fulfilled in order for aspirations to jihad to be valid. These requirements include governance based on the rule of sharia, the warring party's commitment to the defense of the wellbeing and interests of the *umma*, and most importantly, the upholding of the Islamic injunction against the killing of other Muslims. As the army of a democratic nation-state, engaged in warfare against another Muslim people, the Kurds, Turkey clearly violates all of these requirements, and as such, it cannot be an agent of holy warfare. The invocation of jihad with respect to military obligations is further criticized by COs' emphasis on the compulsory character of conscription and the hierarchical organization of the armed forces in Turkey. Claiming that jihad could be waged only by voluntary forces organized in an egalitarian structure, they thus problematize the deployment of this idiom with respect to an army that imposes compulsory conscription.

The nationalist re-casting of Islamic martyrdom with respect to sacrificial death in is the other major target COs' theoretical critique is directed at. Rather than "bearing witness" to the sovereignty and greatness of God, those who die in the operations of the Turkish army are said to bear witness to the power of the national sovereign. In fact, Islamist COs argue that by commanding violence and demanding sacrifice, the Turkish state rivals God's sole authority over life and death. This sacrilegious act of rivalry renders the achievement of true martyrdom in the Turkish army categorically impossible. The fact that the majority of military deaths occur in the operations undertaken against the Kurdish forces further violates the injunction against killing other Muslims in Islam. For all these reasons, Turkey's invocation of martyrdom with respect to military service

is deemed Islamically unfounded. Instead of killing and dying in military service, COs call on Turkey's Muslims to pursue martyrdom by refusing to obey such sacrilegious obligations (imposed on citizens under the pretense of religious duties), and thereby "truly" bear witness to the absolute sovereignty of God over life and death.

Several broader consequences emerge from this chapter's analysis. First and most immediately, it should be noted that the involvement of an Islamist objection within the broader conscientious objection movement in Turkey might help raise wider awareness about this marginal political stance, and possibly extend the reach and appeal of antimilitarism and war-resistance in that country. To be clear, my claim here is not that the emergence of a small group of Islamist COs would necessarily lead to a transformation or the undermining of the deep rooted association between Islamic duties and military service, described in the previous chapter.<sup>63</sup> Such a development would certainly necessitate the growing of this small and marginal group into a much larger and more organized movement with clearly set and methodically pursued objectives. Still, the appearance of Islamist COs and their oppositional stance carves a new site of political and religious contestation within the public sphere – one (it should be noted) that the majority of Turkey's Muslim may be less averse to paying attention to compared with other forms of opposition to military service in that country. In this sense, this emergent act of civil resistance based on Islam may gradually weaken the normative religious

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<sup>63</sup> The following comment made by Mustafa Destici, the Chairman of ultra-nationalist and religious conservative Grand Unity Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi) represent how difficult it seems to be to associate conscientious objection with Islam: "Who are the conscientious objectors? Make no mistake, they are non-Muslims, Yehovah's Witnesses', atheists. I do not think that someone who calls himself a Turk and a Muslim could become a conscientious objector." "Mustafa Destici: Vicdani Ret Isteyenler Ateist ve Gayrimuslim," TV8, Nov 17, 2011, accessed Jan 30, 2013, [http://www.haber365.com/Haber/Mustafa\\_Destici\\_Vicdani\\_Ret\\_Isteyenler\\_Ateist\\_ve\\_Gayrimuslim\\_Video/](http://www.haber365.com/Haber/Mustafa_Destici_Vicdani_Ret_Isteyenler_Ateist_ve_Gayrimuslim_Video/).

authorization of military service and sacrifice and thus help strengthen antimilitarist and antiauthoritarian politics in Turkey.

In addition, given the fact that before Turkey, there has not been an Islamist conscientious objection struggle in the Middle East or other Muslim majority countries, the development of this civil resistance in Turkey, and its critical discourse may possibly inspire other Muslims in the region who are similarly critical of militarist and nationalist interpretations of Islamic traditions. While it remains to be seen whether the Islamist COs' critical discourse will spread beyond Turkey, its development still holds the potential to problematize the contemporary tendency to associate Islamic religiosity and doctrines with sacrificial violence not only in the region but also elsewhere.

Second, the Turkish state's harsh response to Islamic critiques of conscription while itself using Islam to legitimize dying for the state helps expose the paradoxical character of secularism in Turkey. A brief look at the differences in Turkey's jurisdiction on conscientious objection based on Islamic and other religious convictions such as the faith of the Jehovah's Witnesses helps clarify this point. As has been pointed out, after the Bayatyan decision (2011) of the ECtHR, Turkey began to selectively acknowledge Jehovah's Witnesses' right to conscientious objection on account of their pacifist religious convictions. However, with respect to Islamist conscientious objection, Turkey denies the religious character of this civil resistance.

Consider the 2012 decision on the conscientious objection of Muhammad Serdar Delice. In this particular case, Turkey upheld a narrow interpretation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (which concerns the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion), and ruled that this article would apply only to the COs who are



members of a religious faith that categorically rejects military service. While Jehovah's Witnesses' faith passed this test, the court decided that conscientious objection is not compatible with the theological essentials of Islam. "As a belief system," the court stated, "Islam does not reject the use of weaponry, the wearing of uniform, and other provisions entailed in compulsory military service."<sup>64</sup> Given this theological position, Delice's avowedly Islamic conscientious objection could not be considered as genuinely Islamic.

Opposing the court's reasoning, Delice asked for the *mufti* of Malatya to be heard as an expert witness.<sup>65</sup> But this request was rejected on the grounds that courts could only rely upon scientific testimonies. Citing Law No. 5271 of the Turkish Constitution (On Criminal Procedure), the court pointed out that "Article 62 of this Law states that experts must take an oath saying that they will perform their tasks based on science."<sup>66</sup> The court held that the testimony of the *mufti* would not make reliable evidence because "the religious sphere is intrinsically related to beliefs and is dogmatic, [and] hence any view expressed from this field cannot be based on science and includes subjective elements."<sup>67</sup>

Of course, the court's decision was evidently paradoxical. It claimed, on the one hand, that expert religious assessments should not be considered as relevant or determinative in legal proceedings as religious sphere is characterized by subjectivity and dogma. But, on the other hand, the court grounded its legal judgment on Delice's conscientious objection on its own theological assessments about the essentials of Islam (primarily the view that Islam rejects antimilitarism). In other words – and despite

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<sup>64</sup> Ekin Karaca, "Mahkeme Delice'yi Degil Ama Vicdani Reddi Tanidi," *Bianet*, March 9, 2012, accessed Feb 13, 2014, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/bianet/136810-mahkeme-delice-yi-degil-ama-vicdani-reddi-tanidi>.

<sup>65</sup> In Islamic law, a Mufti is a jurist expert on the Sharia.

<sup>66</sup> Yildirim, "Selective progress."

<sup>67</sup> Yildirim, "Selective progress."

affirming the theoretical inadmissibility of theology in the courtroom –, the court asserted its own theological view as objective and authoritative while presenting Delice's interpretation of Islam as inessential and faulty.

Set against Turkey's systematic use of Islamic discourses in its military, this response shows that as a form of governance secularism is characterized not simply by the elimination of religion from the public sphere as conventional accounts emphasize. Rather, and more accurately, it seems to be the sovereign claim to the determinative decision on what religion is and how it should be exercised that characterizes secular power. As we have seen, in Delice's case, the Turkish state disavowed the religious character of Islamist conscientious objection precisely because it upheld a form of Islamic religiosity that diverged from the hegemonic militarist and nationalist interpretation of Islam in Turkey. By pushing the state into a position that requires the revelation of this ambiguous and paradoxical character of secular governance, Islamist conscientious objection thus enables a potent critique of secularism.

Finally, perhaps the most important consequence of the development of an Islamist conscientious objection in Turkey for the theoretical questions explored in this dissertation is its transparent illustration of the tensions attending political projects involving the disciplinary re-interpretation of religious meaning and valuation so that they assist secular politics. Opposing the Turkish state's restriction of religious meaning within a nationalistic and militaristic hermeneutics, Islamist COs' theoretical critique violates these disciplinary boundaries, and as such, demonstrates the rich dynamism and capaciousness of religious imaginaries.

Their resistance further dismantles the sacrificial normativity of the political theological argument concerning the empowerment of theological values to sanctify state power and legitimize ultimate obligations. As we have seen, Islamist COs' critical resignifications of the theological concepts of jihad and martyrdom portray military service and sacrifice as sacrilegious and tragic transgressions of Islamic faith rather than pious and heroic enactments of it as emphasized in official discourses. Turkey's Islamist conscientious objection movement thus shows that the sacrificial paradox inflicting modern politics may survive theological valuations of politics, perhaps not uninjured but certainly alive.

## **CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION**

I have tried to demonstrate in this dissertation that sacrifice is a paradox of the liberal democratic imaginary, the attempted resolution of which requires sustained appeals to, and controversial uses of, religion by modern states. Focusing on the works of two early modern social contract theorists, Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, I have shown that both of these theorists offered complex political strategies to overcome the sacrificial paradox by way of assistance from religion. In Hobbes's account of liberalism, the proposed solution took the form of constructing a radically reformed understanding and practice of religion, the aim of which is to generate a love of obedience and docility that can accommodate the sovereign demand for sacrifice. While it may on the surface seem quite controversial, I argued that Hobbes's solution has in fact come to shape the development of modern secularism much more closely than is allowed in conventional accounts – and continues to influence the governance of religion in modern liberal democracies.

The Rousseauian response to the sacrificial dilemma similarly involved a deep engagement with religion and theological arguments. While agreeing with Hobbes's insight, Rousseau problematized his attempt to resolve the problem from within existing religious traditions. Moving beyond Hobbes's position, Rousseau thus developed a complex account of civil religion that involves not simply patriotic myth-making but also appeals to a "religion of conscience" based on a rich theological structure and ethics. While these characteristics of Rousseau's civil religion distinguishes his account from previous formulations of civil religion within the intellectual tradition of civic

republicanism, I have suggested that it is this complicated Rousseauian legacy that helps explain the surprising accommodations within contemporary civil religions of theological principles that are grounded not in a civic faith but monotheistic religion.

While these political strategies as advanced in the works of Hobbes and Rousseau were to a large extent the products of European modernity and the Judeo-Christian political-theological context, neither their historical impact nor theoretical significance is exhausted by them.<sup>1</sup> Approaching these strategies as theoretical models that travel and develop through their journeys, the dissertation thus proceeded to examine their operations within a majority Muslim secular democracy, situated at the threshold of Europe and the Near East, namely, in modern Turkey. In particular, I focused on Turkey's cultivation of sacrificial citizenship dispositions through national education and universal conscription.

More specifically, the third chapter has shown that Turkish modernization involved the combined pursuit of both the Hobbesian and Rousseauian strategies. As we have seen, in Turkey's adaptation of them, these models were modified in ways that made transparent both their theoretical potentials and the problems attending them. For instance, in pursuing the Hobbesian strategy of reconstructing traditional religion (to make it compatible with the new Turkish nationalism), Turkey went beyond the restrictions impeding Hobbes's project. That is, as opposed to Hobbes's proposed "religion of quiet waiting," which (as the first chapter has shown) emphasizes limits and restrictions to imaginative capacities of the subjects, the reformed Islam in Turkey

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<sup>1</sup> Yet, the influence of the colonial experience and the encounter with other civilizations and religions on the theoretical models advanced by these European theorists should not be underestimated. Especially, Islam and Mohammed as an exemplary founder is cited frequently in Rousseau's work – and before him by other theorists of civic republicanism such as Machiavelli. For a discussion of this theme, see Beiner, *Civil Religion*, 29-36.

involves, alongside restrictions on passions deemed dangerous by the regime, a constructive/enabling theological imaginary that aims to cultivate nationalist passions and enthusiasms.

In relation to this, and perhaps more importantly, Turkish secular modernization incorporated this Hobbesian strategy of religious reform within the broader dynamics of a new civil religion. And as such, it demonstrated that in its practical application, the theoretical models advanced by Hobbes and Rousseau are intimately related to each other. In other words, the construction of a civil religion that intends to generate a patriotic devotion towards the state involves and requires sovereign intervention in, and remaking of, existing religious traditions within a particular community so that they begin to advance the goals of civil religion.

In this sense, the dissertation's situation of the sacrificial problematic of liberal democratic theory within the historical specificity of modern Turkey has enabled not simply a powerful analysis of the sacrificial paradox on the basis of a somewhat "exotic" example. More importantly, it hoped to illustrate (a) the necessary connection between the two prominent strategies advanced by the foundational theorists of liberalism and democracy for re-arranging the relationship between religion and politics in modern states – and consequently, the intimate relation between secularism and civil religion theorizing and (b) that although it is the political-theological situation of European modernity that gave rise to these strategies, their significance and effects are not limited by these contexts, and seem to reach their uttermost clarity beyond the Judeo-Christian context and imaginary.

Finally, in its last chapter, the dissertation addressed some of the consequences that follow from relying upon the empowerment of religious imaginary – entailed both in the Hobbesian and Rousseauian account – to respond to the sacrificial paradox. Through an ethnographic analysis based in Turkey, I have thus presented an emergent Islamist conscientious objection movement that has begun to challenge Turkey’s authorization of a particular theological imaginary in its military. As we have seen, Islamist COs oppose the particular interpretations of religion incorporated within the discourses of Turkish civil religion – in particular the nationalist and militarist interpretations of Islamic traditions of jihad and martyrdom. Though it remains marginal, this resistance puts forward a rival religious imaginary that emphasizes the transnationality of Islamic faith and the superiority of the commitments to the religious sovereign. As such, Islamist COs’ resistance dismantles the very logic of the Hobbesian and Rousseauian solutions adopted by Turkey to legitimize universal conscription and an obligation to die for the state.

For the broader theoretical purposes of the dissertation, Islamist conscientious objection illustrates, first, the dynamism and capaciousness of religious traditions and theological imaginaries, foreclosing the possibility of complete authoritarian mastery by the state. Islamist COs offer competing interpretations of the theological concepts utilized in Turkish civil religion and transform these theological idioms into oppositional discourses that inspire resistance to the state rather than military discipline and sacrifice. This shows that no matter how rigorously a state may try to regulate the particular theological concepts and imaginations it empowers, a complete control and limitation is not possible. Transforming the theological idioms deployed in the discourses of Turkish civil religion into a basis of resistance against secular sovereignty, Turkey’s Islamist COs

thus demonstrate the irredeemably tension-ridden character of turning religion into an instrument of politics.

Further, problematizing the arguments made by theorists such as Paul Kahn, this civil resistance shows that political theology understood as the empowerment of religion to assist political goals and strengthen citizenship may also be unable to resolve the paradox of sacrifice. Through their competing theological re-significations of jihad and martyrdom, COs present military service and sacrifice in the Turkish army as sacrilegious and tragic transgressions of Islamic faith rather than pious enactments of it as emphasized in the discourses of civil religion. Put differently, their resistance facilitates a religious imaginary that disrupts the sacrificial normativity of political theology (and civil religion), revealing that the sacrificial paradox has the potential to survive its theoretical interventions.

## II.

In addition to generating theoretical paradoxes, the persistence of the political-theological within modern liberal democracy raises difficult normative disagreements. Consider, for instance, the controversy about patriotism. When the political appearance of the theological takes the form of a patriotic ethos, many liberals amongst us seem appreciative. In fact, this kind of political theological usage is often considered a positive normative resource in the life of political communities. It is said to bring people together around a shared ideal and purpose, provide them with courage and enthusiasm to rise above their immediacy and face formidable hardship (and sometimes death), and facilitate the formation of new and strong communal bonds and desires and thereby



inspire mutual care and defense. Commenting on the ability of patriotism to generate “a community of faith” united in brotherly love and purpose, Yael Tamir argues, for instance, that patriotism

should not be seen as the pathology infecting modern liberal states but as an answer to their legitimate needs of self-defense or, to put it in even more dramatic terms, as a remedy to their malaise— namely, the atomism, neurosis, and alienation that inflict liberal states and may leave them defenseless.<sup>2</sup>

But others find this kind of uniting and energizing of the masses troublesome. Defending a cosmopolitan ethos against patriotism, Martha Nussbaum emphasizes that a very obvious danger of patriotism is its closeness to “jingoism.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, at its worst, patriotism and other strong nationalist passions facilitate a worldview fractured by binary oppositions – “us” versus “them,” “good” versus “evil,” “you are with us” or “against us,” and so forth. Such an outlook involves an exaggerated conviction in one’s greatness and moral righteousness (“chosenness”), and tends to project other nations as objects of resentment and hatred or threats to one’s security. Within the nation itself, it promotes discrimination against the citizens who are perceived to be not patriotic enough or simply different. In short, patriotism has the potential to preclude the development of sympathy and concern for other peoples “we” share the world with. Understood in this way, it is a dangerous force that fosters antagonism and conflict, and forecloses discussion and empathy.

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<sup>2</sup> Yael Tamir, “Pro Patria Mori! Death and the State,” in *Morality of Nationalism*, ed. Robert McKim & Jeff McMahan (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 229.

<sup>3</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” in *For the Love of the Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 14.

Nonetheless – and despite the above noted dangers – even its critics rarely recommend that we do away with patriotism altogether. Eventually, the affective resources patriotism is capable of providing the polity with is considered necessary even by the large part of its critics. Thus, against the kind of patriotism that borders on jingoism, the remedy is sought in alleviative formulas such as “civic nationalism” (as opposed to “ethnic nationalism”)<sup>4</sup> or “constitutional patriotism.”<sup>5</sup> As Patchen Markell puts it, the goal is to render affect and the emotive resources that patriotism commands safe for liberal democracy, not to banish it from politics.<sup>6</sup>

While patriotism is identified as something to be managed (something to be careful about), other forms of the appearance of the theological within modern politics are not always accommodated in the same way. Perhaps the most obvious contemporary example is the response to jihad. At least within Western liberal democracies, there is no room for moral ambivalence about jihad. There is no “what ifs” or alleviative formulas such as “civil jihad.” And this was the case even before 9/11. In 1996, Benjamin Barber wrote that “jihad is a sickness of the national body and cannot be treated with remedies aimed at detaching the soul from it.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike “bad” patriotism, the response to jihad is a clear and unconditional “no.” Another such example would be the public opinion on *sharia*. Legal systems within the Middle East and North Africa based on *sharia* as well as adherence to it by Muslims living in Europe and North America are considered potential security

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), Benjamin Barber, “Constitutional Faith,” in *For the Love of the Country*, 30-8.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jurgen Habermas, “Political Culture in Germany since 1968,” in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, ed. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). As Patchen Markell notes, the term was coined by Dolf Stemberger. Patchen Markell, “Making Affect Safe for Democracy? On “Constitutional Patriotism,” *Political Theory*, 28: 1 (2000): 58

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Markell, “Making Affect Safe for Democracy?”

<sup>7</sup> Barber, “Constitutional Faith,” 36.

problems – not simply for those who are implicated by it but also for the entirety of the “civilized” world.<sup>8</sup> Identified as irredeemable pathologies, these forms of political-theological are necessarily illegitimate and perilous.

By invoking these examples, my goal is not to simply expose the contingency of the theological dilemma or to argue that it is all about the characteristics of the particular theological concepts or imaginaries that political actors invoke. In fact, I agree that there are important qualitative differences between theological concepts and imaginaries and the consequences of their political empowerment. And it is certainly true that basing governance on religious laws or imaginaries entails significant political dangers for our freedoms and democratic political structures. The point I would instead like to make is that it is an unstable and unconvincing strategy of secular power to rely on certain kinds of political-theological to generate and sustain nationalist/statist attachments and motivations, while identifying some others as irredeemable pathologies that must be purged off the body of the nation no matter what form they may take. The theoretical critique of Islamist conscientious objection examined in this dissertation was intended to illustrate the difficulty of sustaining this approach with any kind of consistency or rigor. It is thus my hope that the reader would leave the discussion not with hard-won convictions about the political-theological in one-way or another, but rather, with a deeper awareness about the necessarily contentious and incomplete character of the political-theological question and the complicated (and not always foreseeable) paradoxes and problems attending it.

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<sup>8</sup> Related to this non-accommodating response are the ban against building mosques or minarets in some parts of Europe, and the attempts to criminalize the donning of the Islamic headscarf in Europe, and the adherence to *sharia* in some states in the U.S.

### III.

Another way of presenting the argument raised in the foregoing chapters is to emphasize that even liberal democratic states whose legitimacy is theoretically grounded in their ability to provide personal security and opportunities for the pursuit of individual goals and wellbeing are ultimately grounded on the claim over life and death. While ideals like equal exchange and self-assumed obligation are facilitated to clothe this fact, in the end, it turns out to be this claim that defines the essence of the relationship between the sovereign and its subjects.

This characteristic of sovereign power becomes most transparent in times of war and military mobilization when the sovereign is required to ask citizens to risk their lives in defense of the nation. At such moments, a theoretical inversion occurs transforming the logic of the social contract ostensibly premised upon the promise of life into its opposite, that is, the demand for sacrifice. I have argued that the reliance on the theoretical logic and resources of the social contract – whether in its liberal or democratic rendering – can neither meet nor legitimize this requirement for citizen sacrifice. As the foregoing chapters have shown, both in theory and in practice, the sacrificial paradox requires an appeal to theological arguments and religious traditions.

This argument is supported by the history of conflict and warfare. We have seen almost too often in the recent decades that theological discourses and appeals to the transcendent make up conventional components of national mobilizations and conflicts. From Israel to Palestine, from Serbia to Bosnia, and from US to Iraq and Afghanistan, modern states engaged in combat make frequent references to religion and theological

arguments in their attempts to justify sacrificial violence and their right to it.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the theological grounding or valuation of political practice and aggression is not limited to sovereign actors. In fact, especially after the terrorist attacks against the United States by Al Qaida, it is more commonly associated with non-state groups and organizations, particularly of Islamist convictions. Thus, whether it is posited in the language of jihad, evangelicalism, or a particular nation's divinely blessed mission, it is clear that theological valuation of sacrificial violence and transcendental appeals are important components of modern conflicts and warfare.

However, while the political need for the theological may be universal, the responses to the eruptions of the theological within conflicts differ quite dramatically. Context and content matter greatly. As has been pointed out above, while invocations of jihad are widely condemned and feared, the sanctifications of the modern state and its violence through the use of theological appeals ("God bless America") are seemingly conventional rhetorical gestures in many political contexts. This suggests, on the one hand, that conventional political judgments on the persistence of the theological in modern politics seems to depend largely on the actors making the appeal, and often, the particular religious traditions and concepts thereby invoked. On the other hand, it seems that on a practical level, there is general lack of concern about this apparent dependence of liberal democracies on theological arguments and imaginaries (especially with respect to

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jeff Sharlet, "Jesus Killed Muhammed: The Crusade for a Christian Military," *Harper's Magazine*, May 2009, accessed Jan 30, 2013, <http://harpers.org/archive/2009/05/jesus-killed-mohammed/>; Anne C. Loveland, *American Evangelicals and the U.S. Military 1942-1993* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Stuart A. Cohen, *Israel and Its Army: From Cohesion to Confusion* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008); Yagil Levy, "The Embedded Military: Why Did the IDF Perform Effectively in Executing the Disengagement Plan," *Security Studies* 16: 3 (2007): 382–408, Blake Page, "Why I don't Want to be a West Point Graduate," *Huffington Post*, March 12, 2012, accessed Jan 30, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/blake-page/west-point-religious-freedom\\_b\\_2232279.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/blake-page/west-point-religious-freedom_b_2232279.html).

national mobilization and defense) so long as the secular sovereign is able to control and manage them.

Of course, there are notable exceptions. For instance, there are hardcore secularists like the late Christopher Hitchens who are vocal critics of such theological invocations wherever they appear as well as secularist states like France where the invocation of God in presidential inaugurations or in parliament would be unacceptable. But, overall, the theoretical problem of the theological underpinnings of secular politics does not seem to generate much concern or worry in the practical life of many modern states until (of course) the transcendental element threatens the secular structure. This suggests that in liberal modernity the relationship between the theological and the political takes a dialectical form. While under “normal” conditions the theological enables and sustains the political – especially at its most sovereign manifestation, that is, when it demands life and commands killing –, it turns into a perilous “other” when it threatens to dismantle liberal modernity.

This ambivalent relationship between the theological and the political has broad implications for the theory of secularism. In particular, it seems that the conventional description of secularism as the separation of politics from religion and the elimination of religion from the public sphere neither reflects the actuality of the rearrangement of the relationship between religion and politics in modernity, nor is a realizable goal. As I have made clear in this dissertation, secular governance involves a sustained attempt to reconstruct and regulate religion in order to make it compatible with liberal democracy.

Put differently, secular power has a quite pragmatic and contingent approach to the role of religion in public life. While it needs, allows, and promotes particular forms of

theological valuation, it prohibits others that are considered to be detrimental to secular sovereignty and state interests. This suggests that rather than an elimination of religion from the public sphere and the disenchantment of politics, secularism should be treated as a sovereign modality of power, engaged with the persistent reconstruction and regulation of religion and religious subjectivities so that they become compatible with the interests of the secular nation-state. While necessarily fractured with ambiguities and inconsistencies, it is this sovereign character of secular power that makes its regulatory capacities so pervasive and efficient.

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