CAUGHT BETWEEN THE NOTIONS OF ETHNICITY, CITIZENSHIP AND DIASPORA: THE CASE OF THE BOSNIAKS IN TURKEY

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Along with many others, Bosniaks are an ethnic group within the contemporary Turkish nation with immigrant roots dating back to the last quarter of the 19th century. They are socially regarded within Turkish society under the category *muhacir*, an attribution used to denote "Muslim immigrants" in the Turkish language.[1] As an immigrant-based community, Bosniaks in Turkey do not form a homogeneous group, as they are members of an immigrant stratum built up by continuous migration waves from various regions in different historical periods and, at the same time, they constitute a multigenerational society. The geographic origins of Bosniaks in Turkey are Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Sanjak[2] region.[3] In terms of migration waves, while during the Ottoman era it was a combination of Bosniak immigrants from Bosnia and Sanjak coming to Turkey, during the Republican period it was mostly Bosniaks from Sanjak who migrated to Turkey.[4] Today, Bo-

[1] Fahriye Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar: Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri (1878–1934)* (Istanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2010), 37.

[2] Sanjak was an administration term used by the Ottoman authorities to denote provinces. The term *Sanjak* (Sandžak) in Bosniak history refers to the territories of the former Novi Pazar province which are currently divided between the states of Serbia and Montenegro.

[3] Amra Dedeic Kırbaç, "Tarih ve Gelenek Bağlamında Türkiye'de Boşnaklar," *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi* 9, no.1 (2012): 704.

[4] Sabina Pacariz, *The Migrations of Bosniaks to Turkey from 1945 to 1974: The Case of Sandzak* (Sarajevo: Center for Advanced Studies, 2016), 109.

https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2021.286 | Poligrafi, no. 101/102, vol. 26, 2021, pp. 31–63

sniaks live in Turkey as Turkish citizens who share many cultural traits with Turks but at the same time possess a different ethnic background.

Constituting a significant ethno-demographic part of the Ottoman legacy within the modern Turkish nation, Bosniaks in Turkey have long refrained from identifying themselves with a separate ethnic or cultural identity when confronted with the assimilationist cultural policies of the new nation state. But while adapting themselves to Turkish culture and identity, at the same time Bosniaks preserved a collective identity of Bosniakness mostly owing to the fact that their population in Turkey has been fed by continuous migration waves in different periods. This multigenerational characteristic perhaps makes them unique among all other ethnic groups in Turkey.

Another important characteristic of the Bosniaks in Turkey is the complexity they encounter in identifying themselves. This self-identification process has presented a problematic situation whereby Turkish Bosniaks can be said to be caught in the middle of concepts of citizenship, ethnicity, and diaspora. The aim of this article is to analyze the problematic development of a Bosniak identity in Turkey with regards to the cultural assimilation processes and continuous migration waves and other factors on both foreign and domestic scales. This qualitative study is based on data acquired from a literature review including books, articles and journals, online sources such as social media groups founded by Turkish Bosniaks, and an in-depth interview held with an expert on Turkish-Bosniak culture. The fact that more in-depth interviews could not be performed due to the Covid-19 pandemic should be noted as a limitation of this study.

The Earliest Backgrounds of Bosniak Identity

For many of those studying the history of Bosniaks, it is a popular tendency to quote Amin Maalouf in terms of stressing the interchangeable character of Bosniakness as an identity whereby he refers to a Bosniak in Bosnia who identifies himself under different identities such as Yugoslavian, Muslim, Bosniak, and Bosnian according to changing

situations in different timelines.[5] The dilemma of expressing identities as seen in this case is highly visible when it comes to the Bosniaks in Turkey. Turkish Bosniak identity presents a merging of the various identities of Bosniakness, Turkishness, Muslimism and muhacirlik.[6] Sharing the same country as citizens with their Muslim co-religionists and being assimilated to a certain extent within Turkish culture, they also maintain an awareness of being immigrants of different territorial and ethnic origins. They are largely caught between these different identities both within emic and etic perspectives. In order to define this dilemma, the historical origins of the Bosniak ethnicity in general and its transformation within the Turkish experience should be evaluated.

In terms of racial origins, Bosniaks are regarded as a Slavic ethnic group and placed by many historians under the category of Southern Slavs along with Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Montenegrins. Linguistically, they speak a dialect of the Serbian/Croatian language which includes a considerable Turkish and Arabic vocabulary integrated into their language during Ottoman rule. The word Bosnia, which serves as the historical origin of their ethnic identity, is actually a territorial term which through the ages has been used to denote the geography covering certain territories of the contemporary Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[7] The etymological root of the word "Bosnia" is a controversial problem among scholars in terms of determining its linguistic origin as used by different tribes who resided in the region.[8] To explain the origins of this term, a general reference is given by many scholars to the word "bos", which is believed to mean "river" in the language of the Illyrians, a historical tribe who inhabited various regions of the Balkans since the ancient age. Illyrians were known to be the oldest residents of Bosnia who belonged to the Indo-European race group and established their dominion in the region in the 9th century A.D.[9]

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5 Amin Maalouf, *Ölümcül Kimlikler,* trans. Aysel Bora (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), 17.

6 *Muhacirlik* in Turkish refers to the state of being a *muhacir* (immigrant).

7 Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar: Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri (1878–1934),* 47.

8 Imamovic, Mustafa, *Boşnakların Tarihi*, trans. Cenita Özgüner and Hüseyin Gül (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2018), 21–23.

9 Amra Dedeic Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri," *Akademik Bakış Dergisi* 35 (March/April 2013): 2–3.

When it comes to determining the ethnic origins of contemporary Balkan nations, it becomes a very controversial and difficult task considering the variety of ethnic tribes who inhabited the region throughout the centuries.[10] The same difficulty emerges within the case of the Bosniaks. Throughout history, various ethnic groups such as ancient Macedonians, Goths, Byzantines, Teutons, Huns, Avars, Bulgarians, Pechenegs, Slavs, Greeks and Turks have inhabited the Balkans.[11] This ethnic and historical variety leads to a highly complex situation in terms of stating the actual ethnic origins of most Balkan nations. There are various approaches to the question of ethnic origins when it comes to Bosniaks, forcing them into a unique situation of consensus. It is a general approach by many Serbian historians to treat Bosniaks as converted Serbs.[12] From the Croatian side, Bosniaks are mostly recognized as converted Croats.[13] Another approach is that Bosniaks are the descendants of Scythians.[14] A current trend which is slowly on the rise among some Bosniaks is to refer to Illyrians as their ancestors.[15] According to Mustafa Imamovic, a renowned Bosnian historian, under any circumstance, the determining factor in the ethnic origins of Bosniaks is the Slavic language and ethnicity.[16]

By building a bridge among the ethno-cultural, territorial/political and religious meanings of the term Bosnian, it is possible to find a general consensus in explaining Bosniak ethnicity. In ethno-cultural terms, Slavic culture under a Slavic speaking community dominated the region beginning from as early as the 9th century. Following this period, the

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10 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Milletler ve Milliyetçilik: Program, Mit, Gerçeklik*, trans. Osman Akınhay (Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayıncılık, 2006), 84.

11 George Walter Hoffmann, "The Evolution of the Ethnographic Map of Yugoslavia: A Historical Geographic Interpretation," in *An Historical Geography of the Balkans*, ed. Francis W. Carter (London: Academic Press Inc., 1977), 464.

12 Aydın Babuna, *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu: Geçmişten Günümüze Boşnaklar* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2000), 1.

13 Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi*, xiv.

14 Ercan Çokbankır, *Arnavutlar, Boşnaklar, Pomaklar: Balkan Türklerinin Kökleri* (Izmir: Etki Yayınları, 2008), 185.

15 Şevket Koç, interviewed on April 15, 2021, Istanbul.

16 Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi,* 19.

term Bosnia also gained a political meaning since it was first a Banate[17] of Bosnia established in the 12th century, which served as a vassal kingdom ruled by local monarchs called *ban* who were bound to Hungarian kings, later becoming the independent Kingdom of Bosnia under King Tvrtko I in 1377.[18] Similar to many cases of deriving national identities from territorial or dynastic names, the historical and mythological backgrounds of the modern Bosnian nation have been founded upon this historical kingdom.[19] But speaking of national identity, in both the Kingdom of Bosnia and the contemporary state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the third element constituting the bridge towards Bosniak ethnicity is to be found in religion. During the reign of the Bosnian Kingdom, the subjects of the Kingdom were divided among themselves on separate religious identities based on sectarian differences. The bulk of the Kingdom's population consisted of three main groups namely Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and the Bogomil. Bogomilism was a sectarian movement named for a Bulgarian priest who had developed a new, alternative Christian understanding and his teachings attracted many followers in Bosnia and the surrounding regions. Unlike other Christians, the Bogomil rejected the Old Testament and the holy days of the Saints and did not convene in churches, nor did they eat meat or drink wine.[20] Based on these alternative religious and cultural beliefs and practices, they were largely regarded as heretics by the authorities of other Christian sects.

The Ottoman Era and the Development of Bosniak Identity

Many historians who study the history of Bosniaks tend to refer to the Bogomil Slavs of Bosnia as the ancestors of modern Bosniaks. According to this approach, the religious element in the construction of Bosniak ethnicity follows a two-fold path whereby following the Ot-

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[17] Banate was the name given to administrational units under the medieval Hungarian Kingdom.

[18] Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi,* 67–68.

[19] Yalçın Köksal Demir, "Cemaatten Ulusa Boşnaklar," *Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 2 (July 2011): 73, http://acikerisim.ktu.edu.tr/jspui/handle/123456789/123.

[20] Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 62.

toman conquest of Bosnia in 1463, the Bogomil masses converted to Islam and this converted community came to be known as Bosniaks.[21] The element which distinguished the Bogomil from their Serbian and Croatian brethren was still of a religious nature: before it was sectarian differences that set them apart and later there was a totally new non-Christian religious identity. So, Islamic religion and Muslim identity became the determining factors for the Bosniak identity. Adhering to the Bogomil-Islam connection, Bosniaks can be identified as the Bosnians who converted to Islam and adapted to Turco-Islamic culture following the Ottoman Conquest of Bosnia in 1463.[22]

For many historians, the conversion of the Bogomil to Islam was a voluntary action and this choice was for mostly cultural reasons. According to this, the Bogomil felt themselves very close to Muslim Ottomans in their view of Jesus as being mortal rather than the son of God and of recognizing Muhammad as a prophet. In addition to this cultural resemblance, the tolerance of the Ottomans towards non-Muslim communities had been an accelerating factor in terms of their conversion to Islam after long years of mistreatment under the reign of the Catholic Hungarian Kings.[23] Some historians have suggested that such a choice of mass conversion, apart from cultural or emotional motives, was prompted by highly rational and even pragmatic reasons. The Bogomil converts, by recognizing Islam as their new religion, were granted certain privileges under Ottoman rule such as opportunities for upward mobility through being employed in the service of the state in various bureaucratic levels of the Ottoman Monarchy. The privilege mentioned here is an officially granted breach of the Ottoman mechanism of bureaucratic reproduction, namely the *devşirme* (devshirme) system. According to this model, Christian children were taken from conquered lands in order to be raised as loyal converts who would be employed in different levels of the military and civil bureaucratic machinery. This system was closed to Muslim-born children, however, the new Muslims of Bosnia were allowed to send their children to the capital for

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21 Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi*, 163.
22 Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 46.
23 Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 74.

their training and education for state service.[24] In addition, the official socio-political order of the Ottoman State namely the *millet* (nation) system was based on Islamic law which suggested the allowance of non-Muslim communities to preserve their beliefs and co-exist with Muslims, but it was a system of Muslim priority in political and legal issues regarding the subjects of the Sultan and in this sense, Muslims constituted the ethnic core of Ottoman society. Thus, their conversion to Islam would in time pave the way for the Bosniaks to become the social and economic elites of their region when compared to the Christian communities of Bosnia and many Bosniaks throughout Ottoman history were able to enjoy the privileges and prestige of being employed in state service.

The Ottoman *millet* system was based on the ethno-demographic mapping of society with religion as the distinctive element. The population of the Empire was divided into various nations, although the concept of "nation" was based on religious and sectarian characteristics rather than the modern understanding of nation. According to this system, Ottoman society consisted of *millets* (nations) such as the Muslim, the Orthodox (Greeks, Bulgarians and others), Armenian (Gregorian) and the Jewish nations.[25] Although each nation included different ethnic groups within itself, such ethnic differences were not taken into account in the eyes of state authorities and before the law. It was religious or sectarian identities which were dominant in this understanding and ethnic identities were given an inferior status. For instance, the ethnic identity of a Muslim subject such as Turk, Arab or Kurd was not a significant matter in terms of societal issues and laws; instead it was the membership in the *ummah* (Islamic community) which determined a Muslim subject's place within Ottoman society. In this respect, Bosniaks were considered part of the *ummah*, but the term Bosniak, which provided a link to their ethnic identity, was frequently used by state authorities and other Islamic communities. In the official state records, they were often referred to as "Bosniaks," "Bosniak *taife*" (Bosniak group) or the "Bosnian people." As for the Bosniaks, they also

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[24] Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi*, 164.
[25] Babuna, *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu,* 14.

kept themselves in a separate position in regards to their co-existence with other Muslim communities.[26] Thus, in both emic and etic perceptions of ethnicity, they were able to maintain their Bosniakness within Ottoman society for centuries. Another issue we should note is that Bosniaks, as autochthonous people of the Bosnian territories, lived together in a concentrated population and could practice and preserve their authentic culture, thus keeping the Bosniak ethnicity alive.

Under Ottoman rule, in time Bosniaks emerged as the socio-economic elites of Bosnia as they controlled large plantations on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan and prospered. In comparison to other local non-Muslim groups such as Serbs and Croats, they could enjoy a higher social status under the religious hierarchy of the *millet* system which placed Muslims at the top. In addition, they succeeded in having considerable access to employment in the Ottoman bureaucracy. Following a *ferman* (royal decree) in 1515, one thousand Bosniak boys were to be sent annually to the capital to be trained for state service.[27] In terms of high bureaucracy, many Bosniak statesmen served the Ottoman crown under the title *pasha*[28]. The most renowned of these Bosniak *pashas* are Hersekzade Ahmed, Damat İbrahim, Sokollu Mehmed, Lala Mustafa, Malkoc Ali, Lala Mehmed, Dervis, Kara Davud, Husrev, Topal Recep, Salih, Sarı Suleyman and Damat Melek Mehmed.[29] These *pashas* still remain in the collective memory of Turkish Bosniaks as figures of collective pride which reminds them of their proud and happy times under Ottoman rule and protection.

Speaking of Bosniaks in general, it is their conversion to Islam which deeply shaped the Bosniak identity. As for the Bosniaks in Turkey, the second important element in terms of identity development is their immigrant background. Bosniaks in contemporary Turkey are not autochthonous, but rather a cumulative group built up by a cycle of huge migration waves which followed one another since the last quarter of the 19th century. These migration waves first started as part of the nationalist uprisings in the Balkans during which the Ottoman State had

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26 Çokbankır, *Arnavutlar, Boşnaklar, Pomaklar,* 187.
27 Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 68.
28 *Pasha* was a title to denote members of the higher bureaucracy in Ottoman administration.
29 Çokbankır, *Arnavutlar, Boşnaklar, Pomaklar*, 190.

lost control of most of its territories in the region, and continued during the Turkish Republican era as well. During this long-term process, thousands of Bosniaks left their homes and followed an eastward route of migration towards the lands which still remained under Ottoman control.

Starting from the 17th century, the Ottoman State entered into long-term conflicts with monarchic powers like Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which aimed to eliminate Ottoman control in the Balkans and establish their dominion in the region. Following the French Revolution in 1789, the conflicting interests of the three major monarchies in the Balkans overlapped with nationalist movements by various ethnic communities in the region who sought independence. In this respect, while Russians assumed the protector role over the Orthodox ethnicities in the Balkans, the Austrians assumed the same role over Catholic communities.

The Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, namely the 93 War in Ottoman historical records, was a turning point in Bosniak history, as this incident marked the beginning of the first migration waves to Turkey.[30] After the war, Ottomans as the defeated party lost their sovereignty over most of their territories in the Balkans on which the independent kingdoms of Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro were founded. The Treaty of Berlin, which was signed after the war, also granted the Austro-Hungarian Empire the right to occupy the region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the motherland of the Bosniaks. Following the signing of the treaty, Austrian troops entered Bosnia marking the end of the Ottoman rule that had lasted more than four centuries in the region. Bosniaks did not welcome this new situation and initiated a resistance movement against the Austrians, but their resistance was easily suppressed by the occupation forces.[31]

Austrian occupation forced many Bosniaks to leave their homes and migrate towards lands still under Ottoman rule, mostly to Istanbul and other Anatolian cities at the heart of the Ottoman State. This migration

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[30] Here, Turkey refers to the former Ottoman territories which are currently under the sovereignty of the Turkish Republic.

[31] Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar,* 116–120.

wave, which formed the first step of the Bosniak presence in today's Turkey, did not occur at once but rather took place as a result of a combination of various factors which promoted the idea of migration among many Bosnian Bosniaks. First of all, there was a strong socio-economic motive behind the idea of migration which foresaw the end of Bosniak dominance in the region without the protection of the Ottomans. Driven by the fear of losing their possessions, wealthy Bosniaks began to sell their immovable properties and migrate to Ottoman territories.[32] This fear of land loss was later confirmed by the agricultural policies of the occupation forces, which installed Catholic subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Bosniak-owned agricultural fields.[33] Among lower class Bosniaks, migrating to Ottoman lands was seen as the first step towards a fresh new start which could facilitate better economic conditions. Rumors were widespread among the Bosniaks, such as it was the Ottoman Sultan's great pleasure to welcome Bosniak immigrants and that he would grant them lands and livestock for free, which accelerated migration.[34]

Apart from economic anxieties, most Bosniaks were feeling insecure about their survival in their homeland and this feeling of insecurity was based on two situations to their disadvantage. First of all, their centuries-long motherland was occupied by a non-Muslim power. Secondly, following the Ottoman defeat in 1878, nationalist movements by various Christian ethnic communities in the Balkans had accelerated with growing violence. Orthodox and Catholic groups could enjoy the protection and support of their sectarian protectors Austria and Russia, the two great powers in the region, but for the Bosniaks, their connection to their Ottoman kin had been broken.

A third motive behind Bosniak migrations was a cultural character which led to a growing anxiety related to the maintenance of Muslim identity against certain assimilationist policies of the occupation forces. The emphasis on Croatian culture and loyalty to Austrian rule, which was highly integrated into the education system in Bosnia-Herzegovina,

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32 Tufan Gündüz, *Alahimanet Bosna: Boşnakların Osmanlı Topraklarına Göçü (1879–1912)* (Istanbul: Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2012), 97.

33 Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 193.

34 Gündüz, *Alahimanet Bosna*, 100–101.

was an influential exercise of an ideological state apparatus and deeply worried the Bosniaks about the risk of assimilation. Another assimilationist policy was the mandatory military service officially imposed on male Bosniaks.[35] Muslim Bosniaks who had lived as loyal subjects of the Ottoman Empire for centuries now found themselves under the political and cultural assimilation of a relatively foreign power which was perceived as a direct threat to the maintenance of their Bosniak identity.

The anxieties of the Bosniaks reached a peak point in 1908 when Austria officially annexed Bosnia, and a second migration wave ensued, which would coincide with the forthcoming Balkan Wars in 1912–1913. In comparison to the occupation period, the ratification of the annexation deepened the collective fear of survival shared by many Bosniaks. The following Balkan Wars, while ending the remainders of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, increased the feeling of insecurity among the Bosniaks who were surrounded by Christian elements in the changing Balkan geography. A never-ending series of attacks and massacres by Christian militia groups targeting Muslim communities in various parts of the Balkans during and after the war forced many Bosniaks to migrate to Ottoman controlled lands, which were considered a safe haven.

Specifying the exact number of Bosniaks who migrated to Turkey between 1878 and 1913 is a very hard task considering the lack and loss of official records during wartime. There is a variety of statistical data claimed by different sources. According to the Austro-Hungarian official records, 63,000 Bosniaks migrated from Bosnia-Herzegovina during this period.[36] Historian Vojislav Bogicevic claims this number to be around 150,000 while Djordje Pejanovic, another historian, extends this number to 160,000. According to Mustafa Imamovic, this number is 180,000.[37] Considering the demographic changes in Bosnia-Herzegovina during this period, the best guess about the number of Bosniak immigrants is said to be around 150,000.[38] Just as it is hard to calculate

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35 Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 197–198.

36 Hayri Kolaşinli, *Muhacirlerin İzinde: Boşnakların Trajik Göç Tarihinden Kesitler* (Ankara: Lotus Yayınevi, 2003), 74.

37 Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri," 10.

38 Babuna, *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu*, 27.

the number of Bosniaks who left Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is also very hard to specify the number of Bosniaks who settled in the territories remaining within the frontiers of contemporary Turkey, again due to a lack of official statistics. The Bosniak immigrants who found their way to Anatolia settled in cities like Karamürsel, Bursa, Adapazarı, İzmir, Ankara and Istanbul. Of these, Istanbul, as the capital of the Ottoman State, the city of the Sultan, most attracted Bosniak immigrants.[39] Many Bosniaks settled in the provinces of Bayrampasa and Yenibosna (New Bosnia) in Istanbul, which still remain as districts with notable Bosniak populations.[40]

The Republican Era in Turkey

As the end of World War I marked a new era in world history with the emergence of new nation states in Eurasia, the fate of the Bosniaks continued to coincide with that of the Turks. Bosniak migrations to Turkey continued with new waves after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. While the migrations between 1923 and 1951 were mostly based on individual choices relatively autonomous of each other, the period between 1952 and 1967 witnessed massive migrations of Bosniaks to Turkey.[41] The basic motive behind the individual migrations in the former period was the dissatisfaction Bosniaks experienced regarding their place and status within the constitutional framework of the Yugoslavian Kingdom founded after the First World War. The political elites of the new state, while emphasizing the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes as the founding elements, ignored the presence of Bosniak ethnicity by simply placing them under the category "Muslims" and by doing so, treated them as their Slavic cousins who had converted to Islam. This official approach made some Bosniaks question their citizenship ties to the Yugoslavian Kingdom and migrate to Turkey, the political heir of the Ottoman State.

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[39] Gündüz, *Alahimanet Bosna*, 173–202.

[40] Muammer Demirel, "Türkiye'de Bosna Göçmenleri," *Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 12, no. 2 (July 2008): 292.

[41] Cemile Tekin, "Yugoslavya'dan Türkiye'ye Göçün Nedenleri (1950–1958)," *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 39 (2018): 250.

The establishment of the socialist regime in Yugoslavia after the Second World War was an important turning point in terms of Bosniak migrations. As seen in the case of most socialist or communist regimes, the ruling elite in Yugoslavia adapted the policy of creating citizens deprived of religious identities and this policy had an extremely negative effect on the Bosniaks. The new regime aimed to cut off the cultural connection of the Bosniaks with their Ottoman past and erase the traces of Islamic civilization in the country. In order to achieve this, a series of executive actions such as the confiscation of some mosques, *turbes*[42] and other Islamic objects, the closure of *mekteb*[43] schools and the enacting of the Law on the Abolition of the veil and burka were implemented.[44] Such restrictive actions caused deep tensions among the Muslim citizens of Yugoslavia and starting in the 1950s, a massive migration wave towards Turkey was initiated. This migration wave included not only Bosniaks but other Muslim communities like Turks and Albanians. According to the official statistics from the Turkish state, following the end of the Second World War, a total number of 240,469 Yugoslavian Muslims had migrated to Turkey.[45] This post-war migration continued until the 1970s in various waves and thus, the Bosniak community in Turkey completed its migratory structure.

One problem regarding the Bosniaks in Turkey is to determine the size of their population. As they were never officially recorded as Bosniaks, there is no official data about their population, but rather there are estimated numbers. In accordance with the official conceptualization of citizenship in Turkey, statistical data related to ethnic origins of citizens are not recorded via census or other means. The only sign of ethnicity officially recorded is religious identity, but this blurs the process as there are many other ethnic groups with a Muslim identity in Turkey. It is rumored that there are 10–12 million citizens of Bal-

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42 *Turbe* is the name given to tombs of renowned religious or historical figures in Islamic culture.

43 *Mekteb*s are traditional elementary schools inherited from the Ottoman Era.

44 Pacariz, *The Migrations of Bosniaks to Turkey from 1945 to 1974*, 127–138.

45 Mustafa Memic, *Karadağ Boşnak (Müslüman) Tarihi* (Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2016), 379.

kan ancestry in Turkey[46] but since this estimated number also includes ethnic Turks, Albanians and others who migrated to Turkey from the Balkans, it fails to constitute a reliable reference.

It is estimated that between 1878 and 1939, around 400,000 Bosniaks migrated from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sanjak to Turkey.[47] According to the official records of the Yugoslavian Chamber of Immigrants, around 185,000 Bosniaks had migrated from Yugoslavia to Turkey between 1945 and 1975.[48] Taking the approximate birth and death ratios over a period of more than a century, an estimated number ranging between 1–2 million would be a rational estimate. As a matter of fact, state-financed research in 2008 specified the number of Bosniaks in Turkey as 2 million.[49] According to Şevket Koç, the owner of the online community newspaper *Boşnakmedya* and a renowned member of the Bosniak community in the Pendik district of Istanbul, there are 3 million Bosniaks in Turkey, but regarding the maintenance of Bosniak culture and identity, this number is as low as 1 million due to cultural assimilation.[50]

This statement by Koç brings forth another question regarding Bosniak ethnicity in Turkey – simply how do Turkish Bosniaks identify themselves within the context of ethnicity, citizenship and culture? Considering the academic literature about Bosniaks in Turkey, it is generally claimed that Bosniaks are a different ethnic group with a Muslim identity and an authentic culture who have historical ties with the regions of Sanjak and Bosnia-Herzegovina, but like many other ethnic groups within Turkish society, they have become subject to cultural assimilation within the policies of the Turkish nation-state. But, con-

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[46] Nurcan Özgür Baklacıoğlu, "Between Neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans and Transnational Kin Economics in the EU," *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 14, no. 3 (2015): 53, https://www.ecmi.de/fileadmin/downloads/publications/JEMIE/2015/Ozgur.pdf.

[47] Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri," 12.

[48] Zeynep Işıl Hamziç, "Marmara Bölgesi'ne Göç Eden Balkan Göçmenlerinin Yerleşim Yerleri," December 14, 2018, https://www.bosnakmedya.com/marmara-bolgesine-goc-eden-balkan-gocmenlerinin-yerlesim-yerleri/.

[49] "Türkiye'deki Kürtlerin sayısı," *Milliyet*, June 6, 2008, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turkiye-deki-kurtlerin-sayisi--magazin-873452.

[50] Koç, interview.

demning these nationalist policies as the only reason behind the assimilation of the Bosniaks would simply mean ignoring the cultural and political attitude of the Bosniaks towards the concept of Turkishness. As one author noted: "Bosniaks are, among all other peoples of Turkey, the most adaptable elements. Unlike such communities as Kurds and Circassians, who coexisted with the Turks for centuries, the Bosniaks have lost their ancestral ties and language wherever they mingled with Turks individually or as small groups, and in terms of national self-identification, they have become Turks even more than ethnic Turks."[51]

During the Republican era in Turkey, Bosniaks have largely refrained from identifying themselves under a different identity and referred to themselves as Turks. This attitude can still be said to be prevalent based on statements such as "We are Turks" or "We are Turks of Bosniak origin" when asked about their identity. Such an attitude is based on various factors which place the Bosniaks among the most adaptable ethnic groups in Turkey and at the same time, all these factors can be counted as the primary elements building the Turkish Bosniak identity which can be summarized as a combination of the notions of being Bosniak, Ottoman, Muslim, Turk and *muhacir* (immigrant).

As noted before, contemporary Bosniak identity finds its roots in the Ottoman era, during which they converted to Islam and developed a separate collective identity among other Slavic Christian communities of their region. Becoming the dominant elements of their region under the religious hierarchy of the Ottoman *millet* system and being Muslim subjects loyal to the Ottomans, they have been identified by their neighboring communities like the Serbs and Croats as "Turks."[52] The term *Turcin*, meaning Turk, was attributed to them by the Christian Slavs, but this term was used to denote being Muslim instead of Turkish ethnicity.[53] During the Balkanization process, Christian ethnic groups who revolted against Ottoman rule for independence ignored the fact that Bosniaks were not ethnic Turks since religious (and sec-

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51 Yaşar Nabi, *Balkanlar ve Türklük II* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 1999), 77.
52 Gündüz, *Alahimanet Bosna*, 13.
53 Imamovic, *Boşnakların Tarihi*, xiv.

tarian) identities were perceived by them as the basis of nationhood.[54] Therefore, this etic identification of Bosniaks with Turks or Muslims in general, found its emic reciprocation among the Bosniaks as feeling close to Turkishness with a religiously comprehensive meaning beyond ethnic background. This reciprocal identification based on religion continued during the Austrian occupation and the establishment of Yugoslavia.[55] Under the reign of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Bosniaks were often identified with the Ottoman Turks who were the symbols of historical enmity in the eyes of the founding ethnic elites of the Kingdom and anti-Islamic propaganda condemning Bosniaks as traitors who had betrayed their Slavic brethren was very popular.[56] A less hostile, but still discriminatory attitude was officially represented during the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, as Bosniaks had to register themselves as either Serbs or Croats since the Bosniak nationhood was not officially recognized before the law.[57] In the 1948 national census, Bosniaks were offered three options of registering as a Muslim Serb, Muslim Croat or Muslim other, and 90 percent of the Bosniaks in Yugoslavia registered themselves as Muslim other, denying the imposition of Serbian and Croatian identities and clinging to their Muslim identity.[58] Such treatment by the state authorities urged many Bosniaks in the Sanjak region to question their place within Yugoslavia and an inclination towards Turkishness as a savior gained momentum, such that:

> There persisted a strong feeling of impermanence and of not belonging, which affected the whole attitude toward the economy and other aspects of life in Sanjak. This was partly due to the broad impression that Bosniak identity is directly tied to Turkish identity… led by the criterion of religion, many Bosniaks ignored the fact of being an autochthonous people of the Balkans and considered Turkey as their real homeland.[59]

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54 Kemal Karpat, *Osmanli'dan Günümüze Etnik Yapılanma ve Göçler* (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2013), 241.
55 Babuna, *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu*, 15.
56 Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri." 11–12.
57 Kolaşinli, *Muhacirlerin İzinde,* 177.
58 Kırbaç, "Boşnakların Türkiye'ye Göçleri," 8.
59 Pacariz, *The Migrations of Bosniaks to Turkey from 1945 to 1974,* 157.

A quotation from an autobiographical text written by a Turkish Bosniak[60] provides a good example of the attitude of the Bosniaks towards Turkey and Turkishness. According to this, an old Bosniak named Mehmet who migrated to the province of Gömeç in Turkey in the 1950s, when asked why he had come to Turkey, replied "can we underestimate the Turkish attitude, Turkish rule and the Turkish flag?"[61] This expression is very enlightening in terms of the Bosniaks' generally observed self-identification with Turkishness as a significant element within the context of Bosniakness and Turkishness is the "Turkish flag," a term which denotes lands of Muslim dominance, a safe-haven which promised salvation from oppression in the eyes of many Bosniaks. During both the Ottoman and the Republican eras, any territory under the Turkish flag was seen by the Bosniaks as the motherland where they could live freely. This perception is directly linked to the social trauma experienced by the Bosniaks after the Ottoman loss of the Balkans whereby they found themselves in an insecure and inferior position. Thus, alienated by their Christian cousins and keeping the image of the Turkish flag alive in their collective memory, Bosniaks identified themselves with Turks with their shared Islamic religious identity.

Thus, shared religious identity and the image of the safe-haven embodied by the Turkish flag have been significant elements which facilitated the adaptation of Bosniak immigrants into Turkish identity. Defining Bosniak ethnicity in terms of their religious differences with Christian communities like the Serbs and Croats in their homelands for centuries, Bosniaks did not much feel the necessity to refer to their Bosniakness within an almost heterogeneous Muslim society and could easily assimilate into Turkish identity. The influence of religion on this situation is obvious when we consider other Bosniak immigrant groups residing in countries with populations consisting of non-Muslim majorities. While these Bosniak immigrants have clung tight to their Bosniak identity, for the Bosniaks in Turkey it was mostly considered normal to adapt to a culture identical to theirs in terms of religion.[62]

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60 Mahmut Çoban, *Güzel Zamanlar Güzel İnsanlar* (Istanbul: self-publication, 2013), 86.

61 The original text in Bosnian was: "Nije šala turska rabota, turski zakon i turski bajrak."

62 Koç, interview.

Even though the highly adaptive character of the Bosniaks, together with the uniting element of Islam, can be seen as significant factors which facilitate the assimilation of Bosniaks in Turkey, the other side of the coin should also be considered an important factor. In this respect, the official policies of the Turkish state concerning the Bosniaks and the attitude of the local Turks should also be taken into account. In this respect, the political and cultural policies of the Turkish state regarding the issue of nation-building in the Republican era have also been influential on the integration of Bosniak immigrants into Turkish society in political, social and cultural terms. The Turkish nation state, founded in 1923, had inherited a multi-ethnic society from its Ottoman predecessor and as seen in all cases of nation-building, ruling elites of the early republic aimed to develop a conceptual definition of Turkish nationhood along with a dominant cultural structure which would serve as a means to unite its citizens. The first initiative in this respect was to define Turkishness as a national identity which directly emerged from Turkish citizenship. Therefore, an official understanding of constitutional nationalism was put into effect. In addition to this, unlike the Ottoman socio-political system, which was highly based on religious organization of state and society, the Turkish Republic was founded upon a secularist framework which based all relations between citizens and state regardless of religious laws and identities. Theoretically, there was no problem with these frameworks, but in practice, as Turkishness also denoted an ethnic identity, the overlapping situation of Turkishness in its ethnic and constitutional definitions caused confusion and dilemma. In this sense, various enactments by the state in the early Republican era included a discriminatory character towards non-Muslim communities of Turkey, which excluded them from the content of Turkishness. On the other hand, defining Turks as a core ethnicity in the new nation-state was also a problem. Even though official efforts to define Turkishness in relation to a centuries-long ethnicity dating back to the first Turkic tribes in Central Asia were initiated as early as the 1930s, the presence of many Muslim ethnic groups like Arabs and Kurds, which did not fit into this definition, constituted a barrier against developing unifying content. Thus resembling the Ottoman *millet* system, which placed Muslims at the top of the social hierarchy,

ruling elites resorted to Muslim identity as a means to define the ethnic core of the republic and this tendency concerned not only the autochthonous communities in Turkey but also others like the Bosniaks:

> The early Republican leaders used to define the Turkish identity in connection to Ottoman Islamic heritage. In this early post-Ottoman conception of the 'Turks left in the lost Ottoman lands' the Bosniaks, Albanians and the other Muslim communities in the Balkans were categorized as heirs of the Ottoman culture, thus, being Ottoman Muslim was considered a priory condition for the membership in the young Turkish Republic.[63]

While this emphasis on religious identity was in contradiction to the secular foundations of the Turkish Republic, it also played an important role in the integration of the Bosniaks into Turkish identity. In this context, the historical phenomenon known as "Turkification policies" has been influential. Turkification policies refer to the official efforts of the ruling elites to create a culturally homogeneous society united under the cultural framework of Turkishness. And, in this sense, since being Muslim constituted a significant element in Turkish identity, Muslim communities of Balkan origin like Bosniaks and Albanians were considered easily Turkified. Such an expectation did not only include the Bosniaks who already resided in Turkey, but also the Bosniaks who still lived outside national frontiers. In addition, Bosniaks and other Muslim groups in the Balkans were regarded as kin communities with their Ottoman background to whom the doors of the country should be open as a historical rather than humanitarian duty. Therefore, the continuous migrations of the Bosniaks during the Republican era were welcomed by state authorities with the hope of their rapid adaptation to Turkish culture and this expectation in time proved to be appropriate despite certain negativities.

The temporary negative impact of Turkification on Bosniak immigrants emerged within the context of language, since speaking the Turkish language was regarded as the primary means of being a Turk. During the early years of the Republic, this was a problem as many Bosniaks could not speak Turkish properly. There was strong pressure from the state on the ethnic groups who were targets of Turkification policy

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[63] Baklacıoğlu, "Between Neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans," 49.

and even language campaigns initiated by Turkish civil society under the title "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" took place starting in the early 1920s. Although the main target of these campaigns were the non-Muslim communities such as Jews and Armenians, Muslim communities with native tongues other than Turkish, such as Bosniaks, Kurds, Circassians, and Arabs, were also included in this agenda.[64] Bosniak immigrants had generally established their own neighborhoods and maintained the Bosniak language as a means of in-group communication.[65] In order to fit with the socio-cultural determinants of Turkishness and extend their social interaction with outgroup citizens, Bosniaks prevalently began to speak the Turkish language. The same problems were also experienced by those who migrated after 1945 and this relatively new immigrant stratum, while adapting themselves to the use of Turkish, could at the same time preserve their Bosniak language when compared to the descendants of pre-republican era immigrants.[66]

Today, the number of Bosniaks in Turkey who cannot speak the Bosniak language is much higher than those who can speak it. The last language based census in Turkey in 1965 marked the number of those who spoke Bosnian as a mother tongue as 21,143.[67] According to the statistics by the Joshua Project, today there are 109,000 people in Turkey who speak Bosnian as their mother tongue.[68] Although these numbers could be deceptive considering possible cases of abstinence in stating a language other than Turkish, observations among the Bosniak communities in Turkey put forward the fact that transmission of the Bosniak language to the younger generations is on a very low level, which makes it difficult for them to preserve their Bosniak identity.[69]

The end of the Cold War at the beginning of the 1990s marked the end of an era in which ideological clashes dominated international politics and ethnic politics began to rise as a new trend on the global

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64 Sanem Aslan, "'Citizen, Speak Turkish!': A Nation in the Making," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13, no. 2 (April 2007): 253, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537110701293500.

65 Kırbaç, "Tarih ve Gelenek Bağlamında Türkiye'de Boşnaklar." 700.

66 Koç, interview.

67 Kolaşinli, *Muhacirlerin İzinde,* 81.

68 "Bosniak," Joshua Project, accessed December 14, 2018, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/10953

69 Koç, interview.

scale. This situation also brought the significance of ethnic and cultural identities back into the social and political agenda in many countries and, fueled by the rise of globalization, an increasing interest in ethnic identities has become an important worldwide phenomenon.

The Bosnian War (1992–1995) as a violent embodiment of ethnic politics in the 1990s marked a cornerstone in the awakening of Bosniak identity in Turkey. The news of massacres of the Bosniaks in Bosnia, while leading to public campaigns against Serbian and Croatian aggression, also evoked a historic link to Bosnia in the collective memory of Turkish Bosniaks. Another contributing factor during this period was the migration of Bosniak refugees to Turkey, which triggered a revival of Bosniak identity.[70] During this period, 20,000 Bosniaks migrated from Bosnia to Turkey although many have returned since the signing of the Dayton Peace Treaty in 1995.[71] Turkish Bosniaks, witnessing the live presence of their victimized kin, began to present an increasing interest in their Balkan origins and Bosniak identity. There have even been those who began to learn the Bosnian language as a result of this wartime awakening.

A more significant influence of the Bosnian War on this identity revival among the Turkish Bosniaks emerged under the foundation of Bosniak NGOs in Turkey. Until this period, possibly due to their successful adaptation to the cultural and political life in Turkey, Turkish Bosniaks had never felt the necessity to get organized in terms of civil society. Most NGOs in Turkey have been founded with the purpose of promoting collaboration among people sharing the same local or ethnic origin, which simply refers to a significant sociological phenomenon in Turkey, namely *hemsehrilik*. *Hemsehrilik*, an authentic Turkish term which can be translated as "hometown belonging" refers to a shared consciousness of having common local roots in the same (*hem*) town (şehir) and forms the basis of a social network which unites people coming from the same town or region and turns into a mechanism of collaboration in terms of employment, finding a marital partner and

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70 Baklacıoğlu, "Between Neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans," 53.

71 Ahmet İçduygu and Deniz Sert, "The Changing Waves of Migration from the Balkans to Turkey: A Historical Account," In *Migration in the Southern Balkans*, ed. Hans Vermeulen et al. New York: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 99.

providing social assistance when needed. The hometown (*hemşehri*) associations in Turkey, while acting as networks uniting people from the same hometowns, also strengthen these shared local identities. Just like hometown associations, NGOs founded upon shared ethnic or cultural identities perform the same functions of social collaboration and cultural reproduction. In this sense, lacking the existence of such uniting bodies throughout their presence in Turkey, Turkish Bosniaks could not have developed a strong sense of hometown belonging or benefited from its collaborative functions like most other local or ethnic groups in Turkey.[72] Bosniak associations which were founded one after another following the Bosnian War began to fill this gap in their social lives.

Unlike other hometown organizations in Turkey, the basic motive in establishing these Bosniak associations was to provide aid and support in both material and non-material form for the Bosniaks in Bosnia and to perform an agenda-building function in terms of drawing the attention of the Turkish public towards their wartime sufferings.[73] The first organization founded in this respect was the Bosnia-Sanjak Association established in 1989, at a time when the clashes among the various ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia became apparent.[74] Following this organization, many other Bosniak associations have been founded in various regions of Turkey with notable Bosniak communities. All these associations are united under the umbrella organization called the Federation of Cultural Associations of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Turkey. As seen in all cases of hometown associations, a locality is placed under the official name of the organization, and in this sense, Bosniak associations refer to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Sanjak as geographic titles indicating their hometown origins.

After the Bosnian War, Bosniak associations in Turkey have extended their functions to establishing social and cultural ties with Bosniak communities in Bosnia and Sanjak, organizing homeland visits and providing material support in-kind for poor Bosniak neighborhoods in these regions.[75] Another function put into agenda by these associations

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72 Koç, interview.
73 Kırbaç, "Tarih ve Gelenek Bağlamında Türkiye'de Boşnaklar," 704.
74 Sait Kaçapor, *Boşnaklar Türkiye'nin Sadık Vatandaşları* (Istanbul: Kastaş Yayınevi, 2014), 43.
75 Kaçapor, *Boşnaklar Türkiye'nin Sadık Vatandaşları*, 144.

is to develop in-group ties by organizing meetings, sociocultural activities and Bosnian language courses. Such activities contribute to the strengthening of an awareness of Bosniakness especially among young generations.[76]

Speaking of such a cultural awakening among the Bosniaks in Turkey, formal initiatives of the Turkish state in the 2000s should also be taken into account. The Turkish government, under the official program titled Democratic Opening Process, aimed to grant certain cultural rights to the non-Turkic ethnic communities in Turkey. In this respect, the first official initiative concerning the Bosniaks was periodic broadcasts on TRT, the state–owned television and radio channels in Turkey, in the Bosnian language which started in 2004.[77] Following this development, in 2017, within the framework of the Living Languages and Dialects Program applied in middle schools by the Ministry of Education, Bosnian language classes have been put into effect as an elective course in two pilot schools in Istanbul and İzmir.[78] While the language courses have been welcomed by many Bosniaks as a positive step, the execution of television and radio broadcasts led to a negative reaction by some Bosniaks on both institutional and individual levels. The Foundation for Friends of Bosnia-Herzegovina made a declaration stating that Bosniaks never demanded such a state service and it was against the principles of citizenship shared by many Bosniaks for state channels to broadcast in languages other than Turkish.[79] On individual levels, many Bosniaks have expressed discontent about this execution on social media platforms. The basic motive underlying such reactions can be explained by the general attitude of the Turkish Bosniaks in terms of identifying themselves as loyal and true citizens of Turkey who fit well with the principles of a unitary state and Turkish nationalism,

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[76] Koç, interview.

[77] "Boşnakça Yayın Başladı," Internethaber, accessed December 14, 2018, http://www.internethaber.com/bosnakca-yayin-basladi-1074844h.htm.

[78] Zeynep Işıl Hamziç,"Halilbeyli ve İstanbul'daki Okullarda Boşnakça ve Arnavutça Seçmeli Dersler Başladı," Boşnakmedya, accessed December 27, 2017, https://www.bosnakmedya.com/halilbeyli-istanbulda-ki-okullarda-bosnakca-arnavutca-secmeli-dersler-basladi.

[79] "Boşnaklardan Boşnakça Yayına Tepki," *Radikal*, June 7, 2004, http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/bosnaklardan-bosnakca-yayina-tepki-713183.

therefore refraining from possible outgroup perceptions towards themselves as a separatist or autonomy-seeking ethnic group.[80]

Regarding other state-based initiatives which evoked interest among the Bosniaks in terms of their Bosnian heritage, the Lineage Query Service, which was put into effect online in 2018, can be said to be influential especially among the young generations as it informs them about their ancestry. In particular on social media platforms, a recent increase in the number of youth who define themselves as Bosniaks in their user info can be observed. Another initiative has been the documentary series titled "Migration Tales" (*Göç Hikayeleri*), financed and broadcast by the state-owned TRT channel, which included an episode about Bosniak immigrants. The documentary has drawn great attention from Bosniaks, and the main character of the episode, Hasan Babayiğit (Babaic) –a Turkish Bosniak living in Gömeç, became a renowned figure among the Bosniak community, his visit to his hometown in the Sanjak region encouraged many Bosniaks to plan similar visits to Bosnia and Sanjak.

Starting from the 1990s, the period of a cultural awakening of the Turkish Bosniaks together with the Bosnian War in the national agenda, the foundation of Bosniak associations and the state-based initiatives regarding them have increased the public visibility of the Bosniaks in Turkey. This situation can also be said to overlap with a shift in Turkish foreign policy. Since the beginning of the 1990s, it has become popular to denote the rising political interest and activism of Turkey in the Balkans under the term neo-Ottomanism.[81] According to this, Turkey, as the heir of the Ottoman Empire who ruled the Balkans for centuries, has adopted a form of kin-politics in the recent decades which assumes the contemporary Muslim communities of the Balkans, such as Bosniaks, Albanians, and ethnic Turks as kin communities and aims to establish transnational bonds with them, especially in cultural and eco-

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80 Koç, interview.

81 İnan Rüma, "Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans: New Activism, Neo-Ottomanism or /So What?," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2010):134, http://turkishpolicy.com/article/406/turkish-foreign-policy-towards-the-balkans-new-activism-neo-ottomanism-orso-what-winter-2010.

nomic terms which would revive Turkish dominance in the Balkans.[82] Within this policy, Bosnia-Herzegovina, regarding its civil war background and notable Muslim population, stood at a significant point through which the political influence of Turkey over the Balkans could be re-installed. The Turkish government even initiated the foundation of the Department of Bosniak Language and Literature in Trakya University with the aim of educating the necessary bureaucratic staff on the mutual relationships between the two countries.[83] In order to establish a link between this neo-Ottomanist policy and the increasing public visibility of the Bosniaks in Turkey, the quote below is very significant:

"The fact that the increase in public visibility of Bosniaks in the public discourse in Turkey (including the emergence of Bosniak hometown associations) coincides with the rise of Neo-Ottomanism in the formerly introverted Turkish foreign policy, raises the question how both phenomena are interrelated. Whenever high-ranking Turkish politicians of the AKP-led governments, like present Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu or President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, visit the Balkans, they conjure up the commonalities and connections between Turkey, the Balkans in general, and Bosniaks in particular. They emphasize the meaningfulness of the Bosniak cause for Turkey due to the shared cultural heritage, and stress the kinship-like intensiveness of Turkish-Bosniak relations due to immigration. Their visits are flanked by prestigious renovations of Ottoman heritage sites under the aegis of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), like the world-famous Old Bridge of Mostar. Moreover, an impressive number of recently opened Yunus Emre Cultural Centers have been successfully promoting Turkish as a foreign language, and are attracting students from and to the Balkans with educational prospects and scholarship programs. Together with the popularity of Turkish soap operas, the perception of Turkishness and the Ottoman past in the Balkan streets has changed tremendously and positively."84

This rising influence of and interest in Turkey in Bosnia-Herzegovina finds its counterpart among the Turkish Bosniaks through the

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82 Baklacıoğlu, "Between Neo-Ottomanist Kin Policy in the Balkans", 56–57.

83 Ömer Aksoy, "Türkiye'de Balkanlara Artan Akademik İlginin Bir Sonucu Olarak Boşnak Dili ve Edebiyatı Programı," *Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 3, no. 5 (2018):146.

84 Thomas Schad, *The Rediscovery of the Balkans? A Bosniak-Turkish Figuration in the Third Space between Istanbul and Sarajevo*, European Institute Working Paper Series (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2015), 6.

roles played by the Bosniak associations in terms of organizing visits to Bosnia and Sanjak, establishing formal relationships with the NGOs and municipalities in these regions and organizing events such as the celebration of Sanjak Day or commemorations of the Bosniak national leader Alija Izetbegovic, all of which deepen the bond between Turkish Bosniaks and their kin in Bosnia and Sanjak. The increasing transnational link between these separated Bosniak communities can be seen as a positive move towards an efficient execution of the neo-Ottomanist kin policy in the Balkans.

The increasing interest of the Turkish Bosniaks in their Bosniak identity and in Bosnia and Sanjak as their territorial origins brought forth a debate in recent years with clashing opinions. Simply put, the question of whether or not to identify themselves as a diasporic community has turned into a debate among various Bosniak NGOs. A general attitude of the Bosniak associations towards this question is to refer to the Bosniaks as citizens of Turkey rather than a diasporic community.[85] These approaches towards the diaspora discourse can be interpreted under the traditional stance of the Turkish Bosniaks as identifying themselves as founding elements of Turkey and perceiving the concept of diaspora with a separatist notion.[86]

Defining diaspora as an ethnic group dispersed as minorities in various nation-states other than their homeland, Bosniaks in Turkey fit with this general definition. This consistence appears to be partially solid in terms of the criteria defined by William Safran where he defined diasporas as communities which: 1) are dispersed to at least two peripheral places, 2) maintain a memory or myth of their homeland, 3) feel an alienation towards the host country due to non-acceptance, 4) maintain the willingness to eventually return to the homeland, and 5) maintain continuing relationships with their homeland.[87]

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[85] Kaçapor, *Boşnaklar Türkiye'nin Sadık Vatandaşları,* 8.; Nusret Sancaklı, "Tarihi Gerçekler Işığında Göçmenler ve Diaspora Safsataları," December 11, 2016, https://www.bosnakmedya.com/tarihi-gercekler-isiginda-gocmenler-diaspora-safsatalari.

[86] Koç, interview.

[87] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 83–84, https://doi.org/10.3138/diaspora.1.1.83.

Bosniaks in Turkey generally fit the first two criteria. First, in terms of being a dispersed community, they form a notable segment of Bosniak ethnicity with their population: which is even larger than the total number of Bosniaks in former Yugoslavia.[88] Secondly, Bosnia is mostly maintained in their collective memory as a historical homeland and this perception is mostly based on emotional rather than rational accounts especially among younger generations. Their use of social media is a highly determining element in this sense. Through increasing use of pictures of the Mostar bridge, Bosnian flag or Alija Izetbegovic's portrait as profile pictures and stating their homeland info as "Bosnia and Herzegovina" on their social media accounts, many Bosniaks, although they have never visited Mostar nor have they been actively involved in Bosnian politics and even have no historical ties with Bosnia with their ancestors having migrated from the Sanjak region, have been inclined towards this mythical image of Bosnia as their homeland.

In terms of the following three criteria, Bosniaks in Turkey do not seem to fully fit with them. Speaking of recognition and acceptance by the host country, the Turkish state has always presented a positive attitude towards the Bosniak immigrants in terms of welcoming them as kin citizens. From the societal perspective, even though minor cases of conflict have sometimes occurred between ethnic Turks and Bosniaks throughout history,[89] they remain exceptional against the general positive attitude of Turks towards their Muslim kin. Bosniaks in Turkey refer to themselves as true and loyal citizens of the Turkish Republic and mostly identify themselves with ethnic Turks in terms of sharing a common culture and destiny. In terms of the idea of an eventual return to their homeland, Turkish Bosniaks, due to being strongly integrated into the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of life in Turkey, cannot be said to share such a willingness. Even though there are minor cases among immigrants from Sanjak who apply for Serbian or Montenegrin citizenship, such initiatives, rather than a motive of return, stem from pragmatic reasons such as possible EU citizenship in the future

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88 Kaçapor, *Boşnaklar Türkiye'nin Sadık Vatandaşları,* 9.
89 Emgili, *Yeniden Kurulan Hayatlar*, 278.

once these two countries are allowed into the Union.[90] Finally, speaking of continuous relationships with their ancestral homeland, Turkish Bosniaks, except for the bonds established by the Bosniak NGOs and touristic homeland visits mentioned above and newly rising commercial relations on the part of some Turkish Bosniak businessmen, cannot yet be regarded as a community retaining strong ties with either Bosnia or Sanjak.

Regarding the general function of diasporas worldwide as groups owning the function of political lobbying, Turkish Bosniaks once more do not appear to be capable of undertaking such a function. In terms of lobbying for their own collective political, economic or cultural interests in Turkey, they do not hold a stance in either the state bureaucracy or civil society. Their political power is rather dispersed among the mainstream right or left wing political parties without any strong desire towards political representation. In the contemporary National Assembly of Turkey, of the 600 MPs, only two are of Bosniak ancestry.[91] In terms of lobbying for homeland affairs, Turkish Bosniaks, with the exception of their involvement in meetings protesting Serbian violence and the negotiations of their civil society leaders with Turkish state authorities asking for active Turkish intervention during the Bosnian War, do not seem much interested in the political affairs of Bosnia and Sanjak. A recent trend among some community elites is to stress the necessity of sending more Bosniak MPs to the Turkish parliament who could work for the increased economic support of the Turkish state to the Bosniak communities living in the vicinity of the frontiers of the former Sanjak region.[92]

Within the context of diaspora and Turkish Bosniaks, virtual diaspora (e-diaspora or digital diaspora in other uses), a relatively new concept in social sciences, can be descriptive regarding the fact that the current trend in the rising consciousness of Bosniakness in Turkey has overlapped with the digital age which, along with the new platforms of

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90 Koç, interview.

91 Doğan Prepol, "Boşnak Toplumu Seçimlerde Birlik Olmalı," *Boşnak Dünyası*, accessed December 9, 2019, http://bosnakdunyasi.com/kasim2018/#p=14.

92 Prepol, "Boşnak Toplumu Seçimlerde Birlik Olmalı,"; "Sancak Günü Türkiye'de İlk Kez Kutlandı," Boşnak Dünyası, December 6, 2019, http://bosnakdunyasi.com/aralik2018/#p=7.

communication and information, directly contribute to this process. A virtual diaspora is:

> an immigrant group or descendant of an immigrant population that uses it connectivity to participate in virtual networks of contacts for a variety of political, economic, social, religious, and communicational purposes that, for the most part, may concern either the homeland, the host land, or both, including its own trajectory abroad.[93]

In accordance with this definition, there is an increasing use of the internet among Turkish Bosniaks who find opportunities for communication, mutual interaction, mobilization and accessing information about their Bosniak culture and heritage which strengthens their awareness of Bosniakness in general and Bosnia and Sanjak as homelands. This virtual space includes websites and online newspapers as a source of information about Bosniak culture, news about Bosnia and Sanjak and Bosniak association activities, social media platforms such as Facebook groups, where they can meet in the thousands, and even instant messaging platforms such as Whatsapp groups. Among these different platforms, interactions among Turkish Bosniaks are most visible in Facebook groups. It is also a general fact that, of the web platforms hosting virtual diasporas, Facebook dominates the market.[94] In the Facebook groups used by Turkish Bosniaks, it has been highly observed that assimilated Turkish Bosniaks, when confronted with others with a relatively concrete consciousness of Bosniakness, lean towards learning more about their Bosniak ancestry and identity. Another rising trend observed in many Bosniaks on Facebook is also the use of their Slavic family surnames along with their Turkish ones.

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[93] Michel S. Laguerre, "Digital Diaspora," in *Diasporas in the New Age: Identity, Politics and Community*, ed. Andoni Alonso and Pedro J. Oiarzabal (Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 2010), 50.

[94] Deirdre McKay, *The Virtual Meets Reality: Policy Implications of E-Diasporas*. *Special Report* (Canberra: The Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2017), 4.

Conclusion

Taking all these phenomena into consideration, it is possible to say that Bosniaks in Turkey do not yet constitute a Bosniak diaspora, but rather they can be regarded as a diaspora in the making. Despite the process of cultural awakening since the 1990s, their commitment to the Turkish state and their political and cultural assimilation into Turkish society still seem to disable the thorough construction of a collective identity effective to alter their feeling of belonging in Turkish society. They rather present the characteristics of a secondary ethnic group, as mentioned in Isajiw's work as, unlike primary or indigenous groups, a community who have their origin in a society different from the one in which they currently exist.[95] Fed by various waves of migration throughout history, lacking a homogeneity in terms of adhering to ethnic culture and being highly Turkified at the same time, the situation of the Turkish Bosniaks as a community caught between the notions of ethnicity, citizenship and diaspora is likely to continue, at least in the short run.

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