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Abstract:

There is ongoing debate in Bulgaria about whether conversions to Islam during the Ottoman empire were forced or not. This work, by scrutinising the conversions to Islam in the early modern Ottoman empire between fifteenth and seventeenth century, with a special attention to the rule of Mehmed IV, concludes that most of the conversions to Islam were voluntarily with socio-economic reasons. The devision of the Ottoman subjects into different religious groups, the so called *millet* system, and its poll-tax of the non-Muslim subjects to the empire will serve as the first independent variable for voluntarily conversion, supported by collected data in three tables concerning the non-Muslim population between the fifteenth and seventeenth century in the Ottoman Balkans provided by the scholar Anton Minkov In addition to it, I will refer to the primary sources *Kisve Bahasi* petitions as the second independent variable, where Christians and Jews petitioned to the sultan, with the demand to be converted to Islam, in exchange for Muslim clothing, money or positions in the military troops or in the palace. In addition to the petitions, as third independent variable, I will use the narrative sources of the conversion policies of Mehmed IV with special regard to the conversion ceremonies where Christians and Jews converted voluntarily to Islam. From the research with the independent variables that I have conducted, I reach the conclusion that most of the Christians and Jewish subjects of the empire converted either to skip the poll-tax, or to change their social class into better one. In addition, Mehmed IV offered benefits to the non-Muslims of their conversion, by glorifying them with Muslim clothes or coins. With this reached conclusion, I contribute to the ongoing debate in Bulgaria about the conversion, by contradicting one of the prominent scholars Hristo Hristov, who argues that the conversions were forced. Together with the works of Ali Eminov and Vera Mutafchieva, I prove that Hristov's thesis is groundless and he fails to provide empirical and adequate sources for his thesis.

Abstrakt:

Die fortlaufende Diskussion in Bulgarien beschäftigt sich seither mit der Frage, ob die Konversionen, während der Zeit des osmanischen Reiches, freiwillig waren oder nicht. Diese Arbeit behandelt den Zeitraum zwischen dem 15. sowie dem 17. Jahrhundert, mit Augenmerk auf Sultan Mehmed IV, jener Machthaber der vor allem durch seine politischen sowie sozio-ökonomischen Veränderungen die Konversionen, im eigenen Reich, vorantrieb, ohne dabei Gewalt anwenden zu müssen.

Das Millet-System sowie das konfessionsabhängige Steuersystem bilden den ersten Teil dieser Arbeit, um aufzeigen zu können, dass die Mehrheit der Konversion aufgrund des freien Willens der Bevölkerung von statten ging.

Darauf folgend bildet die Kısve Bahası den zweiten Pfeiler, der die Freiwilligkeit der ansässigen Juden und Christen, die dem Islam aufgrund von Geld, Kleidung sowie hohen Positionen im Reich, unterstreichen soll.

Die Arbeit weist darauf hin, dass Christen sowie Juden sowohl Steuererlässe als auch Veränderungen der sozialen Klasse durch eine Konversion erlangen wollten. Die Unterstützung dafür erhielten diejenigen von Sultan Mehmed IV der neben Kleidung und Geld auch reiche Feste organisierte.

Um die fortlaufende, bulgarische Diskussion für nichtig zu erklären, zeige ich auf, dass die Lehrmeinung von Hristo Hristov, dass Bulgaren in der Zeit des Osmanischen Reiches Zwangskonversion erlitten, nicht ausreichend widerlegt wurde.

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I would like to express my gratitude to the Vienna School of International Studies for giving me the opportunity to research, develop and create this work which has a very special meaning to me. Since this master thesis is about conversion narratives, let me tell you briefly my story behind this work. After several months of insecurities and uncertainty about the topic, I converted my ideas many times wondering what exactly should be my final work. However, I have decided to dedicate this work to all ethnic Turks in Bulgaria who were victims of assimilation policies of the Bulgarian communist government between 1984 and 1985. This policy was known as the “Revival Process” where all ethnic Turks had to change their names into Bulgarian ones. My parents were not excluded from this policy.

I want to thank to my supervisor Dr. Zeinab Azarbadegan for her kind assistance, help and patience even when I was reluctant to take another step with this research, and whose constructive critic and opinion helped me to shape the final vision of this work. Finally, I want to thank from the bottom of my heart to Matthias Klampfer and my mom, Ayshe Daudova for being always next to me, even in my darkest times of desperation.

Note on Transliteration

I will use the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) transliteration system. Therefore, I will use Modern Turkish spelling for all Turkish and Ottoman terms, names and book titles.

The rules of pronouncing Modern Turkish are as follows:

C, c like *j* in English

Ç, ç like *ch* in English

ğ soft *g*; hardly pronounced

I, ı pronounced like the vowel sound in *earn*

İ, i like *i* in English

Ö, ö like *eu* in French or *ö* in German

Ş, ş like *sh* in English

Ü, ü like *u* in French or *ü* in German

Introduction

A group of elite Ottoman military infantrymen - janissaries, complained in a letter addressed to the Ottoman grand vizier Rüstem Pasha in 1555, that their head officer, who was appointed recently, was a Hungarian convert to Islam, and they appealed their head officer to be removed. Despite the fact that the authors of this complain were themselves converts to Islam through child levy from the Orthodox population in the Ottoman Balkans, they did not find it problematic to complain about the recent convert, and accusing him in religious ignorance, despite his successful service.¹

This narrative shows us how sensitive the subject of conversion to Islam was in the early modern Ottoman empire and how integrationist towards the converts was the Ottoman dynasty. For instance, the new Muslims were integrated to the Ottoman life and society through various mechanism such as given opportunities for “climbing the social class”, specially between fifteenth and seventeen centuries the converts were preferred to Muslims for high ranked positions in the Ottoman government or for the elite military unit of the sultan.²

This work is a study of religious transformations of people and places to Islam in the early modern Ottoman empire. It is constructed on the concept that the intersection of three interdependent elements of conversion resulted in conversion to Islam: conversion of a Muslim to piety, a conversion of a non-Muslim, and a conversion of space.³ Therefore, this work will try to answer the research question what factors favoured the conversions to Islam in the early modern Ottoman Balkans.

The conversion of Islam had its *sublime* moment under the rule of Mehmed IV in seventeenth century, where conversion to Islam became a “state-mandated” policy.

In other words, the empire motivated and “forced” non-Muslim subjects to convert to Islam due to various reasons.⁴ For instance, the Jewish court physicians who were long

¹ Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1.

² Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, 1-2.

³ Marc David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6.

⁴ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 63-68.

time part of the palace and serving the dynasty, had privileges to maintain their religion, however, with the rule of Mehmed IV and his mother Hatice Turhan, the Jews had to convert to Islam so that they can practice their profession. Another “state-mandated” policy was the conversion of Eminönü in Istanbul, from an infidel space, namely Jewish, to Islam.⁵ The radical movement Kadizadeli developed the “state-mandated” conversion into another level, namely to piety. So to say, now Muslims were pressured from the religious movement to convert within Islam, into piety.⁶ Together with the janissaries, the conversion of Jewish physicians and conversion of Istanbul into Islam, one might argue that the “state-mandated” conversion policy was actually “forced” conversion. Indeed, it might be the case, however, not all conversions in the early modern Ottoman empire were forced. The different members of the *millet* system, a system that organised the Ottoman subjects into confessional groups,⁷ converted to Islam due to personal-motivated reasons. For instance, a non-Muslim subject of the empire had to pay the poll-tax, unlike to the Muslims. Therefore, some Christians or Jews converted to Islam, in order to avoid the poll-tax,⁸ some were writing petitions (*Kisve Bahasi*) to the sultan or the grand vizier to ask them to be converted to Islam, and in exchange of that to be appointed in the palace, or to be given job or pension. To the converted petitioners was given Muslim clothes and coins as a symbol of class change in the *millet* system and as a symbol of generosity and Islamic virtues of Mehmed IV.⁹ In addition, the sultan sought the conversions as an instrument for political stability, as a result during his military campaigns or hunting trips, the sultan organised conversion ceremonies where Christians were converting to Islam in exchange of clothing.¹⁰ Therefore, I argue in this work that a great number of the conversions to Islam in the Ottoman Balkans between fifteenth and seventeenth century were voluntarily, with socio-economic reasons.

⁵ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 81-87.

⁶ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 68-72.

⁷ Emrah Sahin, “Ottoman institutions, Millet System,” in *the Cultural Sociology of the Middle East*, Vol. 1, ed. Andrea L. Stanton (California: SAGE, 2012), 181.

⁸ Matthew Long, “Jizya,” in *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Böwering, Patricia Crone, and Mahan Mirza (Green Hall: Princeton University Press, 2013), 283-284.

⁹ Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670- 1730* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 124-128.

¹⁰ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 197-204.

However, scholars like Hristo Hristov argue the opposite that the conversions to Islam in the Ottoman empire were forced.¹¹ During the communist rule in Bulgaria between 1945 and 1989, the communist party faced challenges to deal with the Ottoman afterlives in Bulgaria, namely the ethnic Turks and the Bulgarian Slavic speaking Muslims- the Pomaks.¹² Ironically enough, similar to the “state-mandated” conversion policy of the Ottoman empire, the communist party had undergone with a “state-mandated” assimilation policies towards the ethnic Turks and Pomaks. The assimilation policies, I argue, were pure attempt to convert ethnic Turks and Pomaks into Bulgarian identity, by changing their Turco-Arabic names into Bulgarian ones. The assimilation policy known as the “Revival Process” between 1984 and 1985 implied from the communist party, aimed to change the names of the ethnic Turks into Bulgarian ones, however the attempt failed.¹³ The party justified its actions with the thesis of Hristov who argues that Turks and Pomaks were with lost Bulgarian identity due to the forced conversions to Islam during the Ottoman empire.¹⁴ This statement has provoked an ongoing debate among the Bulgarian intellectuals and academicians, whether the conversions were forced or not. Scholars like Ali Eminov and Vera Mutaftchieva argue that the thesis of conversion of Hristov is invalid, because it is not supported with solid and empirical evidences. Furthermore, they argue that the communist party disregarded the voluntarily conversions, and created a false sense of forced conversion theory.¹⁵¹⁶ Therefore, with this work, I will contribute to the debate with my research and support Eminov and Mutaftchieva in their argumentation.

In chapter one I discuss the coerced conversion with the janissary unit and their child levy policy. I will continue with the radical movement of Kadizadeli who radicalised and purified Muslims of Sufi influence, and later the former became a state ideology of Islam. The space conversion of Eminönü and conversion of Jewish physicians are the last elements of “forced” conversion that I will analyse. In chapter two, however,

¹¹ Hristo Hristov, *Stranitsi ot Bulgarskata istoriia : ocherk za isliamiziranite bulgari i natsionalnovuzroditelniia protses* (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1989), 100-101.

¹² Ali Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 6-8.

¹³ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 7.

¹⁴ Hristov, *Stranitsi ot Bulgarskata istoriia*, 101.

¹⁵ Vera Mutaftchieva, “The Turk, the Jew, and the Gypsy,” in *Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria*, ed. Antonina Zhelyazkova and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Sofia: IMIR, 1994), 34.

¹⁶ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 13.

I will provide three independent variables, namely the *millet* system, the narrative sources of the conversion policies of Mehmed IV and the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions, in order to prove my hypothesis that the conversions were voluntarily. In the final chapter three, I will analyse the concept of nationalism with Ernest Gellner and the understanding of the Bulgarian ethnic nationalism based on language. I will continue with the assimilation policies of Bulgaria towards its Muslim minorities between 1878 till 1989, with a special regard to the “Revival Process” between 1984-1985. And lastly, I will analyse the ongoing debate of conversion between the Bulgarian scholars.

Chapter 1

Forced Conversion

In this chapter I will analyse the forced conversion as a state mandated policy starting with the janissary unit of the sultan, for which non-Muslim children were recruited and forcibly converted. Then I will analyse the Kadizadeli movement and their understanding of pious Islam, which resulted in conversion of Muslims with Islam and Christians and Jews to Islam. The same movement, became later a state ideology of Islam. Lastly, I will analyse different elements of forced conversion - space conversion, and conversion of Jewish court physicians to Islam.

1.1 The Janissaries

The janissary corps, with their mystique and sense of fraternisation mixed with Sufi exoticism, became a symbol not only for the tremendous success for Ottomans in their European military campaigns, but also for being responsible for the state transformation and political crises in the empire towards the nineteenth century. Converted to Islam and converted to the Ottoman identity, they had not only strong influence in the judicial class known as *ulema* but also in the state politics.¹⁷

In this subchapter I will analyse briefly the roots of the Janissary unit in the Ottoman empire and how they were recruited through levy that forcibly converted boys into Islam and gave them Ottoman identity. This is one of the element of forced conversion that I will analyse.

The early Ottoman sultans had modest ambitions for conquering lands, and therefore they did not need any special troops to support them. However, while they were on military campaign, the Ottoman troops were joined by adventurous warriors who, on the other side needed food and money. Some of this worriers converted to Islam and joined the troops or simply left the empire for other campaigns. However, during the

¹⁷ Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries* (London: Saqi Books,1994), 26.

reign of Sultan Murat I, the additional warriors to the Ottoman troops were most likely captives.¹⁸ In order to make them useful for the cause of Murat I, they were sent to the farms of the feudal calvary to learn Turkish, just like Janissary recruits were later sent to schools to learn Turkish. The law of 1362 stipulated that one in every five prisoners had to be sent to spend several years, labouring for the empire before their final transfer to Gallipoli or Istanbul after 1453. Most probably the captives who were sent to Gallipoli to become part of the standing troops of Murat I, were Christians, who later grew in the formation known as Janissary unit or corp.¹⁹

The role of the recruited men to the Ottoman troops became more evident when Yıldırım Bayezid, the son of Murat I was captured from Timur in the beginning of the fourteenth century, Murat I, with the help of Sufi leaders, he reunited the Ottoman lands and within the janissary unit was established with more than 5000 men, however, the janissary unit was fully established under the rule of Murat II.^{20 21} After his death in 1451, Mehmet II became again sultan and needed strong and trained soldiers in order to achieve his goal to conquer Constantinople. To do that, he increased the levy of Christian men, later replaced by boys and enlarged his Janissary army. Some of them were selected according to their intelligence and appearance, and therefore were sent to training schools to build the future elite military unit. Despite the fact that they were converted to Islam, they were not free, they could not be sold or bought, basically they were owned by the sultan.²²

1.1.1 The Christian Levy or Devşirme

The practise of recruitment of children was not invented by the Ottomans, in contrary, it was an old concept, originating from Hindu tradition. For instance, Mughal rulers sent children to war who were either enlisted for this purpose or bought from families

¹⁸ Bernard Lewis, *Islam from the Prophet Muhammad to the Capture of Constantinople*, Vol.1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 226-227.

¹⁹ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 27.

²⁰ Albert H. Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 47.

²¹ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 30.

²² Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent*, 47.

in times of famine.²³ In addition, the Russian empire used the same concept to fill its armies in times of wars. Peter the Great mobilised healthy able-body Russian boys at age of 10 to provide them with education and to enlist them to his army. For example, Similarly to that, the Ottoman sultan bought fifth of all prisoners of war and trained them for his army, he bought all young prisoners at five gold pieces each and sent them to specialised training schools for becoming part of the Janissary unit. The prisoners trained for the Janissary unit were known as *penciks* (slaves) and unlike to the boys who were levied from villages, the former could not bequeath property. The best trained boys were selected from the sultan for himself, whereas the rest were sent to Anatolia for additional training.²⁴ Furthermore, sultans were buying boys from Caucasus quasi- slave families or from slave markets fed by Tatars from their Russian war slaves. Sultans also received youth intelligent boys as gifts from irregular Ottoman cavalry or corsairs in their campaigns in Europe or the Mediterranean.²⁵

However, these examples from the above, were not the majority of the boys designed for the Janissary elite unit of the sultan. It was the levy or the so called *Devşirme* that filled the elite unit with converted children to Islam mostly from the Balkans.²⁶

As the scholar Godfrey Goodwin points out, no child who was converted to Islam voluntarily was subjected to the levy. With other words, only non- Muslim children, mostly Christians were recruited for filling the elite unit of the sultan. In case of an only son of a widow or exceeding a certain percentage of levy from a village, the recruitment was not allowed. The reason behind this exception is that the Ottomans needed to balance the agriculture labor in the villages, the sultan needed the balance for securing the food supply. Furthermore, leaving the less spirited youth, the best boys out of all villages from the Ottoman Balkans were recruited. Most of them were the sons of community leaders. This is designed for Ottoman suppression on the local leaders, however securing a job for their sons, ironically enough, through the levy for the Janissaries. Towns were excluded from levy. The townsfolk, due to their needed skills in the empire, were as well excluded from the levy. Another exception was the

²³ William Irvine, *The army of the Indian Mughals* (New Delhi: Euroasia Publishing House, 1962), 11.

²⁴ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 32.

²⁵ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 32-33.

²⁶ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 34.

no levy on married man, therefore most of the villagers who attempted to prevent their children from the levy, were married by age of 12.^{27 28} In addition to the exceptions were the Romanians, Moldavians or Wallachians, since they were vassals to the sultan, they were exempt from the levy. Jews and Gypsies were also added to the exception. Jews were appreciated for their skills and most of them served in the empire as doctors or accountants of the great estates of the Ottoman pashas, whereas Gypsies were simply despised and undesired in the levy. To the same token, Greeks and Armenians were also excluded from the levy in the beginning, due to their excellent trade skills or Greeks, who provided the empire with the most attractive humanists. As one can see from the above, eventually the most desired boys for the levy were the Balkan Slavs, who were mainly coming from agriculture family with well developed strong and healthy bodies and were non-Muslims.²⁹ The recruiter was known among the Christian villagers as the horse-dealer and as the term suggests, it was unkindly meant. Each visit of the horse- dealer, the Christian households had to lose a child for two causes, namely for the cause of war and the cause of Islam.³⁰

The practice of recruiting had shown a clear success where some of the best recuniteruits from the levy reached highest offices in the empire. At one point Muslim families became jealous of the these converted recruits. Therefore in the first years of the 17th century, the Janissary unit reached its development peak where sons of retired Janissaries were able to inherit the land of their fathers, which contradicted to the old rules of Janissary promotion of inheritance, and on the other side, the unit opened as well for free born Muslims to enlist for the elite unit, which as a result completely transformed the initial concept of Janissary unit.³¹ The Devşirme followed a seven years cycle of recruiting, however, in case of great military activities (especially during sixteenth century where Ottomans were recruiting often due to the military campaigns in Anatolia) , or war campaign, boys could be subjected to levy in shorter periods.³² The original age of the recruited boys is unclear and it depended on various conditions, such as the frequency of the military campaign and the need for new cadre of boys or

²⁷ Reşad E. Koçu, *Yeniçeriler* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 1964), 30.

²⁸ Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent*, 53.

²⁹ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 34.

³⁰ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 35.

³¹ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 35.

³² Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 35.

the number of the village population. The scholar Albert Lybyer , through his research, argues that the estimated age of the youngest recruits was 12³³, whereas the scholar Reşad Koçu argues that only man of exceptional ability were recruited if they were not older than 20.³⁴ On the other side, Goodman relying on Ottoman sources from 1601, argues that the average age of the recruits was between 15 and 20, however he emphasises that there were some changes in sixteenth century where the training for the recruited boys started at age of 13. As we have seen from the above, the levy of young boys was executed only if a long- term policy was to be implemented.³⁵

The organisation of the levy was not an easy process and required months of preparation. The colonel of the cavalymen known as *sipahis* and the *sürücü* (drover) went to one district to another to recruit young boys. Each district had to provide around forty boys.³⁶ When the levy days were approaching, the Christian families in the villagers were preparing for the worst day, so to say loosing their child to the empire and giving them to Islam. At this day the fathers and their boys, together with the priest were waiting the levy troop. Once came, the boys had to be examined both mentally and physically, where once approved they were split from their families, and sent together with the *sürücü* to Edirne and Istanbul.³⁷ At Istanbul or Edirne, the boys were examined second time. For the purposes of their enrolment as future Janissary soldiers, to the boys were given new father names such as *Abdullah* or *Abdülmenan*, a name starting with *abd* which in Arabic means slave, in order to show clearly that the boys are with slave non-Muslim background, and together with the name change, they were circumcised. All this procedure of identity change had the sole purpose, namely to convert the boys to Islam, as it becomes clear by non-voluntarily.³⁸

Once examined, tested and converted, the boys were assigned to different schools for Janissaries. The best out of them were sent to the elite *Enderun Kolej* within the wall of the *saray* - the palace of the sultan, where they were trained for entering the palace. The rest recruits were sent to schools outside of the walls where they were trained for different units of the Janissary. All the boys, however, received a high quality of

³³ Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent*, 52.

³⁴ Koçu, *Yeniçeriler*, 25-26.

³⁵ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 36.

³⁶ Koçu, *Yeniçeriler*, 27.

³⁷ Koçu, *Yeniçeriler*, 28.

³⁸ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 37.

religious education, even sometimes higher than the *medreses* (religious school), they were also taught Persian, Arabic and Turkish, as well as horsemanship, archery and *jerid* (mounted dart- throwing sport).³⁹

Despite being converted forcibly to Islam and split from their families, the boys received a secured future by being posted in some of the units of Janissaries or being inside of the palace, however, as the sultans later would discover, exactly the Janissaries would reshape the politics of the empire by residing with their favourite prince. Nevertheless, their influence in the politics in the palace would cease with the radical religious movement Kadizadeli which I am going to analyse later in this chapter.⁴⁰

1.2 The Kadizadeli Movement A State Ideology of Islam

In the mid- to late seventeenth century, the Ottoman empire experienced state transformation not only in terms of military campaigns to Europe, stabilising the empire under Mehmed IV after several weak sultans, but also strengthening the role of Islam. Preachers with reformist ideas served as mediators in the conversion not only of non-Muslims, but also for Muslims to their understanding of Islam, which transformed the Ottoman society and the religious landscape of Istanbul. Many of the reformist Islamic ideas of the movement Kadizadeli in the seventeenth century were first introduced in the previous century, however, this time the difference laid on the fact that it was linked to the ruling class. The bond of political power and religious zeal of sultan Mehmed IV and like minded priests in the late seventeenth century, actively reshaped the Muslim behaviour towards piety, as well as a strict control on Jewish, Christians and other non-Muslim subjects, who at one point converted to Islam.⁴¹

In this subchapter I will analyse shortly the movement's origin, and its rise to the political power. I will look the Muslim resistance of conversion to piety and finally

³⁹ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 37-38.

⁴⁰ Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, 33- 53.

⁴¹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 63-64.

how the movement became a state ideology of Islam with Mehmed IV's conversion to piety.

1.2.1 Kadizade Mehmed Efendi and the origins of the Kadizadelis

When a preacher converted from one interpretation of piety to another one, the most influential seventeenth Islamic movement in the Ottoman history began.⁴²

Born in Balikesir, son of a magistrate, Kadizade Mehmed Efendi began his spiritual path as a Sufi, and who became a preacher inclined toward Sufism. However, later he turned away from the Sufi practices arguing that Islam was corrupted with innovative and foreign elements such as Sufi dance and song, the use of coffee, opium and tobacco, pilgrimage to tomb of saints and radicalising even to adding more than one minaret to a mosque, such as the newly built Sultan Ahmed I Mosque with six minarets, where his rival Sivas Efendi was preaching.⁴³ He declared that true Muslims and their rules had the existential purpose to promote the Qur'anic command of "enjoying good and forbidding wrong" where it refers to these Muslims who do not live in accordance with practises found in the Hadith, Shariah and Qur'an, they had to be "returned" to the correct way, and to people with different religion than Islam to be converted to the former.⁴⁴ Kadizade and his followers accused Sufi leaders, Sufi music and dancing of Halveti and Mevlevi Sufis, and accused everyone who were preaching them, as infidel. The first target of the movement was the prohibition of tobacco and the execution of these who consumed it. When Kadizade became close to the palace, he advised Mehmed IV to prohibit the consumption of tobacco and to close all coffee shops, since it was known place for selling opium. Countless innocent coffee and tobacco consumers were executed in Istanbul.⁴⁵

Not all Muslims were keen on the radical changes of Islam imposed from Kadizade and some protested. For instance, the opposition to the Kadizadelis was greatly vocal in the intellectual circles. The head of the religious official hierarchy -

⁴² Thomas Lewis, *A Study of Naima*, ed. Norman Itzkovitz (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 106-110.

⁴³ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 65.

⁴⁴ Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age, 1300-1600*, trans. Norman Itzkowich and Colin Imber (New York: Praeger, 1973), 184. and Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 65.

⁴⁵ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 66-67.

Sheikhulislam, and magistrates responsible for implying the rules of the Sharia, opposed the movement, arguing that the Kadizadelis challenged the authority of the court and religious leaders, and violating the law. In addition, the famous Ottoman writer Katib Çelebi critiqued the radical breaches of Islam, specially Kadizade for hampering the conversion to Islam, by giving it a bad name with their radical and dangerous practices.⁴⁶ He argued further that the prohibition of old practises could shake the Muslim unity and bring to conflicts. However, his main argument against Kadizade and his followers is that innovation could and should not be contained, due to the fact that, when a custom takes root in the tradition, it becomes legitimate and cannot be simply erased. He warned not only the sultan but also the grand viziers about the dangerous consequences of such radical movement. He proved to be correct, the disputes between Kadizadeli's followers and the rest of the Muslims and their resistance to convert to pious Islam, caused separation and divisions of Muslims in Istanbul where by the middle 1650's by any opportunity, the two fractions would dispute and fight ending up bloodsheds.⁴⁷

Sultans and Kadizadelis

Sultan Mehmed IV, before his conversion to Kadizadeli ideology, he maintained a close relations with the Sufi orders. He had a very close connection to the Sufi preacher Sivas Efendi, who on the other side promoted and supported the Mevlevis and Halvetis Sufi orders throughout the empire. However, Mehmed IV was found of some of the Kadizadeli ideas such as closure of coffee houses and prohibiting tabasco consumption, that elevated his image as a sultan among the pious Muslims.⁴⁸ With the prohibition of the "morally endangering goods", Kadizade approached Mehmed IV to fulfil his promises to his subjects as a religious and state leader to prohibit and punish those who practices or followed erroneous beliefs. The relationship between Mehmed IV and Kadizade blossomed further, where he even accompanied the former in the Armenian military campaign, however, after becoming heavily sick, he returned to Konya where he died in 1635. His death did not stop the followers of the movement

⁴⁶ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 72

⁴⁷ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 72-73.

⁴⁸ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 68.

to spread their propaganda and to create a very deep network in the palace. For instance, they converted to pious Islam palace guards, gatekeepers, servants of the inner court, harem eunuchs and others who would serve as mediators to the Kadizadelis for further conversion of Muslims and non-Muslims subjects. Among the converted were the mother of the sultan, Hatice Turhan, who together with the harem eunuchs opposed the grandmother of Mehmed IV, Kösem Sultan, who on the other side supported Halves and Bektashi Sufis (the Janissary unit). The murder of Kösem in 1651, weakened the positions the Sufis in the palace, and opened the path to the Kadizadeliz.⁴⁹

In the bringing of Mehmed IV's reign, there was not sign of intention to change the old order. Therefore, the Sufi influence on Mehmed IV in the beginning of his rule was greater than the Kadizadeli. Mevlevi preachers gave spiritual guidance to the young sultan, for instance in 1648, Mevlevi Mehmed Pasha was a very active part of the guidance of Mehmed IV, and one year later Sari Abdullah Efendi taught the sultan how to live in accordance with the Sufi practices. While Mehmed IV was building his understanding of Islam according to the Sufi practices, Kadizade's successor, Arab Üstüvani Mehmed Efendi of Damascus (d. 1661), was busy to secure the Kadizadeli's presence in the royal court. Because of his close connections to the followers of the movement in the harem and the palace, he successfully entered the royal ward in 1651 where he began his active campaign against the Sufi preachers, and eventually succeeded to remove them from the royal family.⁵⁰

Üstüvani Mehmed Efendi and his followers argued that the empire's military failures abroad and the economic difficulties were due to the affiliation of the Ottoman religious and administrative establishments with the Sufi orders, therefore the former aimed to replace the Sufi presences in Istanbul, with a pious, clean of innovations and foreign elements Islam, in order to bring the old glory of the empire back.⁵¹ The new leader of the movement believed that through coercion and violence, a conversion could be successful. His influence in the palace and among the family members of the dynasty grew considerably, and therefore, convincing the grand vizier Melek Ahmed

⁴⁹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 69.

⁵⁰ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 69-70.

⁵¹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 70.

Pasha that the weak state of the empire was due the Sufis, the vizier order some of the Sufi orders to be removed, so that their influence could be reduced. Kadizadeli went even radical with their anti-Sufism by destroying Sufi tombs or harassing Sufi members in the streets.⁵² As a result, the Kadizadeli movement led by Üstüvani Mehmed Efendi went beyond control and became extreme and radical in terms of violence. The Kadizadelis preachers were accused and blamed from the Ottoman population and partially from the court for inciting rebellion against the rule. Therefore, the popularity of Üstüvani Mehmed Efendi ended when Köprülü Mehmed Pasha was appointed as the new grand vizier. Köprülü Mehmed Pasha, who was on the side of the religious establishment (with their head *Sheikhulislam*) immediately exiled Üstüvani Mehmed Efendi and his followers to Cyprus, with the hope that the order and peace in the city would be restored.⁵³ However, with the new leader of the Kadizadeli Vani Mehmed Efendi, the influence and the glory of the movement would gain even further support, namely from Mehmed IV, who will later convert to Kadizadeli's pious Islam.

1.2.2 A State Ideology of Islam

Sultan Mehmed IV abolished Istanbul and moved himself to Edirne in 1663, where he also appointed Abdi Pasha to be the court historian. Abdi Pasha was a Muslim from Istanbul, who was educated at the palace and was trained to administer the empire. Through his writings he witnessed the conversion of Mehmed IV to pious Islam, with the mediation of the new leader of the Kadizadelis, namely Vani Mehmed Efendi. In the chronicles of Abdi Pasha, after the great fire of Istanbul and the spacial and spiritual conversion of Jewish places and Jewish people took place, the historian noted that the fist signs of pious conversion of Mehmed IV appeared.⁵⁴ For instance, the sultan, after 1660, celebrated each year the birthday of Muhammad. In each his travel or visit to a place, he would not miss a Friday prayer, in contrast to the previous sultans. Since hunting was his passion, he would go to hunt each free moment, however, he would not miss a prayer in a mosque or at the palace, even he had to cancel huntings.

⁵² Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 71.

⁵³ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 75.

⁵⁴ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 106-107.

While Abdi Pasha was following the conversion to pious Islam of Mehmed IV in the mid 1660's, the historian began to note the role of the third Kadizadeli preacher Vani Mehmed Efendi in the conversion process of the sultan.⁵⁵

Vani Mehmed Efendi was most likely, as the Ottoman sources advocate, a Kurdish preacher from Kurdistan who became the first preacher in the imperial mosque of Hatice Turhan in 1665. His influence grew rapidly in the royal family, specially to Hatice Turhan and the grand vizier Köprülü. The movement reached its greatest political and social influence in the Ottoman empire, not under the previous preacher Üstüvani Mehmed Efendi, but with Vani Mehmed Efendi. He became very close to Mehmed IV in the early 1660's, where the latter relied on the former for spiritual guidance. The sultan never missed a Friday prayer led by Vani Mehmed Efendi, and enjoyed the spent time with the preacher discussing Islam and its application in the society.⁵⁶ During military campaigns, specially the second campaign against the Commonwealth of Poland in 1673, the Kadizadeli preacher accompanied the sultan and prayed together with him. At one point, the family of the preacher also became close to the dynasty and gained many advantages where his sons- in- law became university professors in Bursa.⁵⁷

After 1660, the relations between the dynasty and the Sufi orders, specially the Bektashis, Halvetis and Mevlevi, who were historically allied to the dynasty, worsened, mainly caused by Vani Mehmed Efendi, who as previous Kadizadeli leaders, opted to "clean" the dynasty and the empire of unacceptable innovations and practices. With the influence of the Kadizadeli preacher, Mehmed IV strengthened the Sharia law against them and against any other innovation of Islam. The preacher accused the *Shikhulislams* in moral corruption and in implementation of innovations to Islam. His accusations to the head of religious institutions were persuasive, and as a result, his teachings for the "correct" way of Muslim's life got more and more popular. In addition to the preacher, the grand vizier prohibited Sufi gatherings in Mevlevi lodges in Beşiktaş and Galata between 1665 and 1666, and suppressed their public performances of whirling.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 108-109.

⁵⁶ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 111.

⁵⁷ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 112.

⁵⁸ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 114.

In 1665, Mehmed IV, who completely converted to the pious way of life, prohibited the playing of music, musical instruments and dancing, since according to the preacher these practices corrupted the mind of a pious Muslim. Moreover, the Kadizadeli preacher believed that the taverns and the wine trade caused further corruption in morality, therefore between 1660 and 1670 all taverns were destroyed in Istanbul, so that the alcohol trade to be hindered. As a result, these actions had economic consequences on the empire's budget, since the wine- trade and consumption provided great profit for the empire and as later it would appear that it was a mistake to the dynasty that would cause great crises, however, only the Kadizadelis gained further followers from this policies.⁵⁹

Now the empire was clean of innovations and foreign elements, and having the support of the Kadizadeli's movement, Mehmed IV and his mother Hatice Turhan had the opportunity to continue with their conversion plans, namely the former with his conversion ceremonies and the latter with conversion of space.

1.3 Conversion of Istanbul

In an era where conquering the lands of infidels was paramount for the Ottoman empire, the so called *ghazi* period of the Ottomans, the most visible and symbolic change of the conquered territories was the conversion of Christian and Jewish spaces to Islam, namely transforming churches, synagogues to mosques or construction of imperial mosques in order to mark the Islamic hegemony of the new rulers. The Islamic religious buildings, specially the imperial mosques made visible not only the power of the ruling dynasty, but also became symbol of state affairs, hegemonic interests and created meaning for these who entered them or passed by outside.⁶⁰

It was crucial for the Ottomans to transform the landscape of the conquered lands, since the transformation of space changes the perception and the experience of the

⁵⁹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 117.

⁶⁰ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 81.

Ottoman subjects to their environment and shows clearly the dominant features of the rules.⁶¹

The cataclysms and the natural disasters during the begin of the Sultan Mehmed IV's reign, provided the perfect conditions of space conversion. The great fire of 1660 that destroyed significant part of Istanbul, gave the opportunity to the mother of Mehmed IV, Valide Sultan Hatice Turhan to develop her conversion to piety policies, namely changing the space of Istanbul by converting Jewish landscape to Muslim landscape, as well as building an imperial mosque at the heart of the Jewish district- Eminönü. The Ottoman stories of the imperial mosque's construction show clearly that the change of the landscape of Istanbul to Islamic one, specially in the Jewish district serves as a symbol of conversion of infidel place to pure Islam, and this continued the *ghazi* element, however, in an space conversion narrative.⁶²

After the second conversion element in the Janissary unit, in this subchapter I will discuss the other aspect of forced conversion, namely the space conversion. I will use Hatice Turhan's Jewish space conversion to Islam in Istanbul as an example and will contribute further to the topic with the construction of the Valide Sultan Mosque.

1.3.1 Conversion of Jewish Space and construction of the imperial mosque

The great fire that destroyed half of the landscape of Istanbul in the summer of 1660, provided Valide Sultan Hatice Turhan with the opportunity to reshape the urban area by promoting Islam through conversion of Jewish space into Muslim space.⁶³

For the valide sultan, the construction of the imperial mosque complex in Eminönü was a good legitimation of the dynasty's name. Unlike to previous laws of previous sultans, the construction or reconstruction of synagogues was prohibited. As a result, after the fire, the Jews could not rebuild or build their synagogues and had to abandon their properties. Most of the Jews were even expelled from their homes in the district,

⁶¹ Ethel Sara Wolper, *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 3.

⁶² Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 81.

⁶³ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 85.

due to the fire. Therefore, the freed space of Eminönü was ready to host the imperial mosque.⁶⁴

After the devastating fire, the valide sultan engaged in series of travels and visits to the damaged places, in order to demonstrate the dynastic solidarity with the people and to symbolise the religious dedication of the royal family. However, due to her sex and age, she could not deliver martial messages like her son Mehmed IV, nevertheless, she used Islam and the religious devotion as an instrument for influence. Shortly before the fire, she was reconstructing fortresses and small mosques, however, with the destruction of half of Istanbul from the fire, she had the opportunity to have a physical impact on Istanbul by leaving her traces in the reconstruction of a new mosque that would mark her name and her son's Islamic virtues for a long time.⁶⁵

The location of the imperial mosque had to have a strategic means not only for Islam, but also for the dynasty. The district Eminönü provided the perfect spot: a port and is near to the palace. However, this place had been already a targeted space for the mosque in 1597 from a previous valide sultan- Safye Sultan who, like Hatice Turhan was a Christian convert and lived in the palace, gave an order to the head of the imperial architects, Davud Agha, to build the foundations of an imperial mosque in Eminönü. She used the anger of Venetian and Muslim merchants towards Jewish tax farmers and merchants to choose the location of Eminönü. The latter accused the Jews in unbearable conditions on foreign trade and monopolising the textile market. Muslims complained to the sultan for the situation and demanded that Jews to be prohibited of tax collecting, the sultan granted their wish. On the other side, Safye Sultan used this opportunity and confiscated Jewish property and in their place the construction of the mosque began.⁶⁶ Despite the completion of the foundations, different factors hampered the further construction. The massive costs, the death of Davud Agha in 1598, the difficulty of such a large construction in a small place, and finally the death of Safye Sultan and Sultan Mehmed III in 1603, all these conditions stopped the construction of the mosque till the great fire and the provided opportunity for Hatice Turhan to complete the mosque with her own wealth. She expelled all the Jews living closely to the palace and the foundations of the mosque. They were even

⁶⁴ Uriel Heyd, "The Jewish Community of Istanbul in the Seventeenth Century," *Oriens* 6 (1953): 311-313.

⁶⁵ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 86.

⁶⁶ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 86.

threatened with death if they were not selling or leaving their homes. Jews were easy to expel from the district, since they were more vulnerable in comparison to Christians, specially the Orthodox who were the largest group in the city and their strong financial situation and a patriarch representing them, or the Catholics with their support from western European powers.⁶⁷

In addition, by imperial decree, Jews were also forbidden to rent apartments in the district. The Ottoman authorities expelled Jews who rented rooms in apartments owned by Muslims in the area of Eminönü.⁶⁸

The Sharia court records for the appropriation of the Jewish property and land, and the new elite and dynastic perception of the Jews, illustrated in their letters glorifying the imperial mosque of Hatice Turhan , showed clearly how the attitude towards Jews had changed, since the conquest of Constantinople. Sultan Mehmed II, the conquerer of Constantinople, brought Jews from Anatolia and other places to Istanbul to repopulate it. He even was a refuge for Jews who were expelled from central Europe. Sultan Bayazid II, similarly to Mehmed II, welcomed expelled Jews from Spain and Portugal to live in Istanbul. Nevertheless, Mehmed IV was the one who not only removed the descendants of these Jews from the heart of Istanbul, but also left them without home and meanings.⁶⁹

The mosque was completed and the first Friday prayer took place in 1665. For the mosque's decoration no expense was spared. The most fine artisans, painters and architect were requested to build and create the glory of this imperial mosque. With its conquest of infidel place (Jewish inhabitants), the mosque continued an old tradition of ghazi ideology that by removing the Jews and converting it to Islam, the holy mission of the dynasty was accomplished. Moreover, the location of the mosque had a financial reason, due to its approximate to the Egyptian market replaces. It provided the religious need of merchants and Muslim foreigners under an imperial "blessing". The strategic location of the mosque provided another detail, namely with its visibility, the imperial mosque became the first imperial building to greet a person arriving at the main port and showing the dynastic devotion to Islam.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 86-87.

⁶⁸ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 88-89.

⁶⁹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 91.

⁷⁰ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 91-93.

1.3.2 Conversion of Jews

After the construction of the imperial mosque by Hatice Turhan, Jews lost their homes and their privileged position being in the royal family and residing next to the them. However, having converted the Jewish space of Eminönü into Muslim one, the next conversion policy of Hatice Turhan would be to convert all the serving Jews in the palace to Islam.⁷¹

Till the seventeenth century, all the important medical figures, such as doctors, dentists, and oculists were Jews and they were treating the sultan and his family on intimate terms. Practically the Jewish physicians were part of the family. Hence, for Hatice Turhan it was crucial that these same physicians to be pure of “Jewish” thoughts and element, since they were close to the sultan, and therefore they had to be either converted to Islam or simply removed.⁷² One might argue here that this could be counted as a voluntary conversion since the Jewish physician had a choice whether to convert or not, however, I do argue that it is a forced conversion, since the physicians were best at this profession, they did not have any other choice, but to convert to Islam, in order to keep their job. With the primary sources from Ottoman archival data provided by the scholar Marc Baer, one can see later that the “voluntarily” conversion from Hatice Turhan’s policy was actually a purpose move to purify Istanbul from Jews.

In the sixteenth century, the position of the private physician was occupied mostly by Jewish, however, during the seventeenth century, the number drastically declined. The palace salary registers indicates that between 1603 and 1604 there were twenty-one Muslim physicians and sixty-three Jewish physicians. However, between 1607 and 1608, the number of Muslim physicians was the same, however, Jewish physicians declined with twenty-two, namely they were forty-one. Under Mehmed IV, the number of the physicians was cut drastically to eighteen from which fourteen Muslim and four

⁷¹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 122.

⁷² Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 132.

Jewish physicians. Later, the number was increased again, however the Muslim physicians were the dominant group. One of the factors that could be considered as a soft power to conversion to Islam was the salary. In 1652, the highest paid Muslim physician got 100 akçe per day, whereas the Jewish physician got 45 akçe per day in 1653. Despite the decrease of the physician's salary later, the highest paid Muslim physician got 85 akçe per day in 1672, in contrast, the Jewish physician got 25 akçe per day in 1666.⁷³ As one can see from the above, the Muslim physicians were earning two times more than the Jewish one, however the salary element was just part of the conversion process. It was the radical changes for the physicians in the palace that affected the Jews and promoted the "voluntarily", however, forced conversion to Islam. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, a Jewish head of the physicians in the palace led a large staff of Jewish physicians, and a smaller Muslim one. Nevertheless, by the end of the century, a converted Jewish head of physicians of the palace led a large staff of converted Christians, Jewish and Muslim physicians.⁷⁴ In order to understand the reason of conversion of these physicians, one needs to look up the narrative sources. For instance, evidence from a writing by a palace preacher Vani Mehmed Efendi's inner circle, explains that in sixteenth century, the medical education of Jewish physicians was sufficient condition to stay as a private physician to the sultan and to remain part of the sultan's court. However, with the seventeen century, the rules for private physicians at the palace were drastically changed from sultan Hatice Turhan, for whom the medical education of Jews for being a private physician of the sultan was not enough. In order to have a private momentum with the sultan, they had to convert to Islam. For instance, the Spanish Jewish physician Moses son of Raphael Abravanel became the symbol of this policy, he converted to Islam in order to maintain his position as a private physician of sultan Mehmed IV. He, with the new names Hayatizade Mustafa Fevzi Efendi became the head of the court physicians in the palace in 1669.⁷⁵ His desire to become head of the physicians was hampered in the beginning from Hatice Turhan, she did not allow him to cure the sultan till his conversion to Islam. He did not have any other choice, but to convert in order to keep his position. The narrative source from the Kurdish Preacher Mustafa provided

⁷³ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 133.

⁷⁴ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 133.

⁷⁵ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 136-137.

by Baer explains that for Hatice Turhan- it was not important how superior was the knowledge or medical education of a Jewish physician, it was important that he had to become first Muslim and then to have an access to the sultan's body. Only after spiritual cleansing of Jewish elements, the physician had the right to touch the skin, to talk to the sultan and to determine what caused an illness of the sultan's body. In the late seventeenth century, the Jewish physicians felt pressure from the dynasty to convert to Islam. Even with the best medical education, the Jews were hampered to become physicians due to the conversion policy of Hatice Turhan.⁷⁶

The conversion policies of Hatice Turhan were just as complex as the construction of the imperial mosque by converting the space into Islam and converting the Jewish physicians in the sultan's court and private chambers. Jews had not choose, but to accept the policies, in order to keep their positions and homes.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 137.

⁷⁷ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 138.

Chapter 2

Unforced Conversion

In this chapter I will analyse the “personally- motivated” conversions, in other words the voluntarily conversions. However, before to analyse it, it is crucial to look up the confessional divisions in the empire, in the so called *millet* system, where non-Muslims had to pay poll-tax to the empire. It is important to analyse the system, in order to have an idea why the conversions were with socio-economic reasons.

In addition to it, I will analyse three tables provided by the scholar Anton Minkov that will observe the Ottoman population, specially the Christian one between fifteenth and seventeenth century.

In the second part of this chapter I will analyse the conversion activities of Mehmed IV through narrative sources, supported by the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions of Minkov. With these two independent variables, I will be in the position to support my hypothesis that the conversions were voluntarily.

2.1 *Millet* System

The Ottoman empire was successful to rule different peoples and religious groups forming them as minorities across the empire. These groups of different peoples had to be organised in a flexible structure, that would keep the empire stable and that would incorporate different identities under one rule.⁷⁸ This structure was called *Millet* system where the Ottoman subjects were divided into religious communities, not according to their ethnicity.⁷⁹

The word *Millet* from Ottoman language means nation(s), that these group of nations resulted from the consequences of the plural societies of the conquest lands. With the Ottoman expansion between fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, the new lands of

⁷⁸ Syahrul Hidayat, “Minority groups in Ottoman Turkey before 1856: different arrangements of the Jews and the Christians under Millet system,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 4, no. 1 (June 2014): 33.

⁷⁹ Emrah Sahin, “ Ottoman institutions, Millet System,” in *the Cultural Sociology of the Middle East*, Vol. 1, ed. Andrea L. Stanton (California: SAGE, 2012), 181.

European Balkan, North Africa and Arabian Peninsula offered different ethnicities and religious groups that were incorporated into the Ottoman empire. The groups were protected based on the Islamic Law constructed on the concept *dimmi*, or People of the Book. The concept regulated the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims and provide relative autonomy to each non-Muslim group to implement their own community law or to practice their religion.⁸⁰ Differently said, each millet has its relative autonomy. The largest millets were the Orthodox (including Greek, Bulgarian, Arab, Serbs and others) under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Armenians (Catholic, Apostolic and Protestant), the Jewish groups, and other minor ones. The Armenian, the Orthodox Patriarch together with the Jewish Rabbi were de facto the leaders of their *millets* and were responsible for inter community matters such as collecting taxes, executing family and civil laws. The autonomy of each millet was guaranteed not only under the *dimma* concept, but also if they were loyal to the Ottoman government and accepting the superiority of Islam.⁸¹ The *millet* system was also one of the revenue machines of the empire, where each non-Muslim subject or in this case each *millet* had to pay poll-tax to the empire known as *jizya*.⁸² The Muslim subjects of the Ottoman empire had higher privileges and were not paying the *jizya*. Till the seventeenth century, the Jews were appreciated for their professions and trade skills in the empire, however with the rule of Mehmed IV, as I mentioned above, the situation changed and the Jews lost their privileged *millet* position. They were replaced by Armenians and Greek who represented the all Orthodox people and developed further the trade.⁸³

However, some members of the *millet*, wanted to jump the social class and to obtain better privileges by becoming Muslims.

I argue in this work, that the conversions to Islam that occurred between the fifteenth and seventeenth century, mostly were voluntarily conversions. I provide narratives of the life of Mehmed IV as convert maker of Orthodox Christians provided by Baer and his research in the archives, in addition to the narratives I will use the *Kisve Bahasi*

⁸⁰ Hidayat, "Minority groups in Ottoman Turkey before 1856," 29-30.

⁸¹ Sahin, "Ottoman institutions, Millet System," 181.

⁸² Matthew Long, "Jizya," in *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Böwering, Patricia Crone, and Mahan Mirza (Green Hall: Princeton University Press, 2013), 283-284.

⁸³ Hidayat, "Minority groups in Ottoman Turkey before 1856," 41-44.

petitions written by Orthodox Christians and Jews, asking Mehmed IV for converting them into Islam provided by the scholar Anton Minkov, and finally three tables analysing the Muslim and Christian population in the Ottoman Balkans between the fifteenth and seventeenth century provided by Minkov. Based on my analyses of the above mentioned independent variables, I argue that these voluntarily conversions were with socio-economic means, so to say the Orthodox Christians converted to Islam, simply because they wanted the same privileges as the Muslim subjects of the empire, or to obtain positions in the palace provided by the Ottoman government.

Unlike the janissaries who were converted to Islam forcibly, the Orthodox members of the *millet* system could choose whether they stay in the group that they belong to, with relative autonomy, paying the poll-tax to the state, or simply convert to Islam and to be equally treated.

Looking the three tables of Minkov I will argue that the slow growth in the Muslim population of the Ottoman Balkans, was due to the voluntarily conversions. I do base my hypothesis on that, because if there were only forced conversion, then the numbers of the Muslim population would have been much higher than in the tables, that I am going to analyse.

The Demographic Situation in the Ottoman Balkans between the fourteenth and seventeenth century

The earliest registers that cover the Ottoman Balkan Peninsula are from the end of the fifteenth century. The data contained in Table 1 below, is based on the extracted information from the scholar Minkov who refers to the analyses of Nikolai Velkov and Asparuh Velkov who present the numbers of non-Muslim subjects of the empire (the members of the Orthodox *millet*) paying *jizya* and the converted Christians to Islam between 1488 to 1491.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670- 1730* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 37.

Table 1. Jizya paying non-Muslim population in the Ottoman Balkans in the end of the fourteenth century⁸⁵

<i>Sancak</i>	1488	1488 new Muslims	1489	1489 new Muslims	1490	1490 new Muslims	1491
Silistra	12,283		12,283		12,283	3	12,481
Nikopol	16,557		16,557		16,557		18,208
Vidin	10,578		10,784		10,784		10,639
Sofia	18,673		18,675		18,675	9	19,226
Kustendil	40,787		40,807		40,807		43,441
Krusevac	42,511		42,452		42,452		43,912
Vulchitrn	30,163		30,214		30,108	5	29,890
Prizren	30,182		29,939		29,924	1	30,196
Bosnia	21,846		21,782		21,764	99	20,546
Herzegovina	29,551		29,127		28,788	62	28,112
	(6,987)						(7,007)
Shkodra	11,984		11,984		11,988		12,720
Dukagin	(1,594)		1,594		1,594		1,550
Ohrid	22,958		23,170		23,170	11	24,259
Elbasan	10,492		10,577		10,718		11,530
Vlora	35,402		35,902		35,922	12	38,423
Janina	29,008		29,026		29,026		30,673
Trikala	40,119		40,217		40,217		42,346
Eubea	17,749		17,698		17,724	2	19,744
Morea	30,750		30,656		30,106		29,743
Preveza	21,894		21,981		21,981		23,219
Gypsies	5,954		5,859		5,699	12	5,721
							(3,398)
<i>Muaf</i> (only <i>ispence</i> paying <i>reaya</i>)	19,079		19,177		18,760		(18,760)
Miscellaneous	15,729		15,525		15,230		(5,915)
	(5,759)				(15,230)		
Total	665,622	7	665,576	94	664,463	229	686,129
	(642,544)	0.001%	(665,576)	0.01%	(659,648)	0.03%	(632,531)

Based on the figures above, we can have the following conclusions. Firstly, for the three years between 1488 and 1491 there was increase with 0.3 percent of the non-Muslim population which show that even with the conquest of the Balkans by the Ottomans, there was no disturbance of the Christian population.⁸⁶ If we look the city Silistra, we can see that for three years only 3 new Muslims appeared.

⁸⁵ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 39.

⁸⁶ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 39.

In addition, Sofia for three years got 9 converted Muslims. However, the situation is not the same for the Bosnia region where for three years 99 conversions happened. We can conclude, that the slow growth of the conversion in the Ottoman Balkans was still in its begin and was innovative, where only 2,5 percent of the Balkan population has converted to Islam.⁸⁷

The situation with the slow growth of Muslims in the Ottoman Balkans does not change even in the sixteenth century. The data in table 2 below, is based on the data extracted from the tax registers for the Balkan population between 1520 and 1535 by Minkov. He calculates that the tax-paying population in the Ottoman Balkans for this period are 242, 109 Muslim households (22.2 percent) in comparison with 844,777 non-Muslim households (77.8 percent).⁸⁸

Table 2. The population in the Balkan Ottomans between 1520-1535⁸⁹

<i>Sancaks</i>	Christian households	%	Muslim households	%	Jewish households	%	Total
Pasha	183,512	72.5	66,684	26.3	2,998	1.2	253,194
Smederevo	106,861	97.8	2,367	2.2			109,228
Trikala	57,671	81.9	12,345	17.5	387	0.5	70,405
Kjustendil	56,988	89.5	6,640	10.4	49	0.1	63,677
Morea	49,412	97.0	1,065	2.1	464	0.9	50,941
Nikopol	31,891	77.4	9,122	22.1	206	0.5	41,219
Bosnia	19,619	53.7	16,935	46.3			36,554
Eubea	33,065	98.0	663	2			33,728
Janina	32,097	98.1	613	1.9			32,710
Krushevac	25,759	96.7	881	3.3			26,640
Sofia	24,311	93.9	1,569	6.1			25,910
Shkodra	23,859	95.5	1,116	4.5			24,975
Ohrid	32,748	98.1	641	1.9			33,389
Prizren	18,382	98.1	359	1.9			18,741
Herzegovina	9,588	57.5	7,077	42.5			16,665
Zvornik	13,112	83.2	2,654	16.8			15,766
Tchirmen	1,578	11.1	12,686	88.9			14,264
Preveza	11,395	99.9	7	0.1			11,402
Elbasan	8,916	94.4	526	5.6			9,442

⁸⁷ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 40.

⁸⁸ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 40.

⁸⁹ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 40.

Table 2. (cont.)⁹⁰

<i>Sancaks</i>	Christian households	%	Muslim households	%	Jewish households	%	Total
Gallipoli	3,901	43.7	5,001	56	23	0.3	8,925
Montenegro	3,446	100					3,446
Silistra	6,615	27.7	17,295	72.3			23,910
Vize	9,467	43.7	12,193	56.3			21,660
Vidin	19,517	95.5	914	4.5			20,438
Vuchitrn	18,914	96.4	700	3.6	7		19,614
Dukagin	1,829	100					1,829
Gypsies	10,294	59.9	6,897	40.1			17,191
Kizilca			5,157	100			5,157
<i>Müsellems</i>							
Misc.	3,000	37.5	50,000	62.5			
Total	844,777	77.4%	242,109	22.2%	4,134	0.4%	1,091,020

If we take the same example as we did in table 1. with Sofia, one can see that from 1520 to 1535, the Muslim households increased with 6.1 percent, whereas the Christians population remains relatively high. Silistra, on the other hand, has significant increase in the Muslims households with 72.3 percent, in contrast to the declined Christian households to 27.7 percent. On the whole, based on the two tables, the Muslim population increased between 1491 to 1520 by total 132,782 households.⁹¹ The situation with the Christian households is completely different when it comes to the the seventeenth century. Minkov uses data provided by the scholar Elena Grozdanova that indicates the decrease of the non-Muslim households for seventeenth century.

In Table 3 below, one can see that the decrease was more evident in the second half of the seventeen century with 70 percent in some cities.^{92 93}

⁹⁰ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670- 1730*, 42.

⁹¹ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 42.

⁹² Elena Grozdanova, *Bulgarskata narodnost prez 17 vek. Demografsko izsledvane* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo Nauka i Izkustvo, 1989), 526.

⁹³ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 54.

Table 3. Changes of the non-Muslim population in the Ottoman Balkans in seventeenth century⁹⁴⁹⁵⁹⁶

<i>Vilayet</i>	Beginning 17c.	30–40s of 17c.	% change	50–90s of 17c.	% change	Total % change
Berkofça	3,860	3,966	2.7	2,401	–39.5	–37.8
Bitolja	4,838	4,433	–8.4	3,014	–32.0	–37.7
Vidin	5,007	5,248	4.8	4,078	–22.3	–18.6
Vranja	5,090	4,406	–13.4	1,200	–72.8	–76.4
vraca	3,729	2,821	–24.3	820	–70.9	–78.0
Demir Hisar	3,690	2,679	–27.4	1,300	–51.5	–64.8
Drama	1,908	1,609	–15.7	1,613	0.2	–15.5
Dupmiçe	4,908	4,562	–7.0	1,500	–67.1	–69.4
Znepole	3,647	3,077	–15.6	2,660	–13.6	–27.1
Zihna	3,544	3,393	–4.3	3,179	–6.3	–10.3
Korça	2,855	2,046	–28.3	3,300	61.3	15.6
Kostur						
(Kesriye)	4,016	3,949	–1.7	2,440	–38.2	–39.2
Kustendil	6,016	4,378	–27.2	2,659	–39.3	–55.8
Maleflov	4,372	1,800	–58.5	1,198	–33.4	–72.6
Melnik	1,127	665	–41.0	152	–77.1	–86.5
Ohrid	3,658	3,518	–3.8	2,250	–36.0	–38.5
Petriç	2,690	2,547	–5.3	1,438	–43.5	–46.5
Pirot						
(chirköy)	2,622	2,640	0.7	2,244	–15.0	–14.4
Prilep	1,630	1,704	4.5	1,500	–12.0	–8.0
Provadia	5,152	5,111	–0.8	5,720	11.9	11.0
Radomir	3,899	2,756	–29.3	1,388	–49.6	–64.4
Serfice	3,059	2,999	–2.0	2,000	–33.3	–34.6
Silistre	6,224	5,170	–16.9	2,537	–50.9	–59.2
Sofia	5,589	5,046	–9.7	3,945	–21.8	–29.4
Istrumiçe	2,912	2,980	2.3	1,149	–61.4	–60.5
Serres	4,332	4,505	4.0	4,354	–3.4	0.5
Tirnov	4,657	4,442	–4.6	3,937	–11.4	–15.5

⁹⁴ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 54.

⁹⁵ Grozdanova, *Bulgarskata narodnost prez 17 vek. Demografsko izsledvane*, 518–521.

⁹⁶ Minkov adds only 31 areas, since the data provided by Grozdanova is fully completed only for these areas. Therefore, the total change in percentage of Minkov derives from the one composed by Grozdanova.

Table 3. (cont).⁹⁷

<i>Vilayet</i>	Beginning 17c.	30–40s of 17c.	% change	50–90s of 17c.	% change	Total % change
Florina (Lerin)	2,194	2,328	6.1	1,700	–27.0	–22.5
Horpi te	5,188	3,880	–25.2	3,279	–15.5	–36.8
Hirsova	1,626	1,578	–3.0	954	–39.5	–41.3
tip	4,170	3,143	–24.6	1,778	–43.4	–57.4
Total	118,209	103,379	–12.5	71,687	–30.7	–39.4

From the numbers above, one can see clearly that the non-Muslim households decreased significantly in the seventeenth century. For instance, in Silistra non-Muslim households decreased for 90 years with 59.2 percent in total. Similarly, Sofia's non-Muslim households decreased for 90 years with 29.4 percent in total.

There are four plausible scenarios provided by Grozdanova for the decrease of the non-Muslim households: 1) due to mass emigration of population to other countries; 2) a great rate of mortality due to epidemics; 3) due to physical harm and destruction resulted from repressions, and 4) due to bigger rate of conversions to Islam.⁹⁸ Minkov points out that according to Grozdanova, it is conversion to Islam that caused the decline of the non-Muslim households. The data provided by Grozdanova analyses the non-Muslim population distributed mainly in the rural areas with 92.4 percent, whereas she observes only 7.6 percent from the urban area. As a result, this table provides the results mostly for the rural- living non-Muslims who, according to Grozdanova, converted to Islam.⁹⁹¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670- 1730*, 55.

⁹⁸ Grozdanova, *Bulgarskata narodnost prez 17 vek. Demografsko izsledvane*, 526.

⁹⁹ Grozdanova, *Bulgarskata narodnost prez 17 vek. Demografsko izsledvane*, 504.

¹⁰⁰ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 55.

I support the assumption of Grozdanova that the decline of non-Muslim households must consist in the conversion to Islam. In the next section of this chapter, namely 2.2. I will analyse the voluntary conversions that occurred during conversion ceremonies or hunting seasons of Mehmed IV supported by narratives of the Ottoman historians concerning his conversion activities, and with *Kisve Bahasi* petitions provided by Minkov.

2.2 Mehmed IV- the convert maker the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions

Many Ottoman sources, as well as numerous chronicles indicate, hunting was the preferred amusement of Mehmed IV, which allowed the sultan to have close contact with his subjects, specially Christians, in which circumstances he used the opportunity to convert them into Islam.¹⁰¹ In this subchapter I will analyse the conversion ceremonies, as well as the hunting passion of Mehmed IV as means for conversions of Christians to Islam. As second independent variable I will provide the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions by Minkov which indicate the voluntarily conversions under Mehmed IV in his late years of rule.

2.2.1 Mehmed IV- the convert maker

Mehmed IV's hunting trips were with different durability, for instance from one day to two months. His court historian Abdi Pasha noted that he was hunting often while he was in Edirne or Istanbul, as well as before and after military campaigns. For example, the sultan spent fifty-five days in hunting around the city Yambolu in 1666.¹⁰² As Baer notes, historians have underestimated the mobility of the sultan's court could be and that it served as a traveling conversion maker. For instances, while he was riding on horseback through the forest of Rumelia or while being on hunt or holding court in the imperial tent, Mehmed IV always opted for inviting Christians to join the imperial fold or mediating their conversion to Islam by offering them

¹⁰¹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 179.

¹⁰² Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 182.

conversion ceremonies where the new Muslims were given Muslim names and were redressed in Muslim clothing.¹⁰³ For instance, an Englishman, working as a chaplain to the British ambassador in Istanbul during the 1670s, recorded in his diary the circumcision celebrations of the Princes Mustafa and Ahmed in Edirne in 1675.

John Covel noted that during the celebration of the circumcisions of the Princes, the sultan secured a banquet for thousands of people who were attending with their children and the sultan gave to each circumcised child a set of clothing and purse of coins. Covel noted as well, that among these people were also Christians who were mostly from Christian empires and smaller numbers of Ottoman Christian subjects who converted to Islam. It is particularly interesting how the Ottoman chronicles depicted the central role of the sultan in this conversion moment. The first instance is the actual religious conversion, so to say the public transformation of Christians to Islam. Covel points out that the Christian subject would appear before the sultan or the grand vizier in the imperial tent (set up for this occasion) express his wish to convert and exchanges his headgear of a Christian for a Muslim turban and recites that *Allahu Akbar*, which symbolises the final conversion to Islam and the change of millet class from Orthodox *millet* to Muslim one.^{104 105}

The observations of Covel are important for us, since he witnesses all the conversion procedure and the implementation of a statute that indicates how the court of Mehmed IV dealt when a male Christian wanted to convert and what was the procedure for it. After the death of the grand vizier Faizl Ahmed Pasha in 1676, the new grand vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha, ordered the court historian Abdi Pasha, who was also serving as an imperial chancellor between 1669 and 1678 to create a procedure for conversion based on all known Ottoman statutes into a single set of Ottoman law. Abdi Pasha statued “The Statute of the New Muslim” which stipulated:

If an infidel [Christian] should desire to become Muslim in the present of the grand vizier in the imperial council, at once he is instructed in the articles of the faith of Islam. After a command is ordered to the imperial treasurer for a handful of coins

¹⁰³ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 185.

¹⁰⁴ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 189-190.

¹⁰⁵ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 190. Here Baer refers to John Covel, "Dr. Covel's Diary," in *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, ed. J. Theodore Bent (London: Sickle Moon books, 2001), 209-210.

and clothing as gifts of kindness to be bestowed upon the convert, an usher takes on delivers him to the imperial surgeon on duty that day in the council. The surgeon immediately takes him to the designated corner and circumcises him [right then and there]. It is an ancient statute for one of the imperial surgeons to be on call every day in the imperial council and in the palace of the grand vizier.¹⁰⁶

This archival document will allow us to examine what Covell witnessed. As Covell point out only male conversions, this statute confirms explicitly that the procedure was designed for male Christians who wanted to convert. The understanding of the word “infidel” in seventeenth century referred to Christians, since Jews were labeled as “Jews”. Moreover, it is particularly interesting to point out that in the statute the highlight of the conversion is the desire. So to say, the Christian men who wanted to be converted to Islam, had voluntarily to convert their religion. As Baer points out, nothing tells us in the statute for coerced or forced conversion. Furthermore the agency is giving to the one who desires to be converted. With other words, it is the converts who are seeking the court, not the court the converters. Once the Christian appears before the grand vizier and expresses its desire to convert, then the court instructs the future convert in his new religion. One might ask why there was a necessity that the court had to instruct the Christian about Islam. As Baer assumes and I do agree with him, that a Christian man wanted to become Muslim without being familiar in detail Islam and what it entailed.¹⁰⁷

The short analysis of the statute does not cover the complete understanding of the conversion process, however it supports my hypothesis for the voluntarily conversion. However, as Baer argues this statute leaves many questions unanswered. For instance, were only Christian men converted at the court? How exactly did the conversions occur? And what type of clothing was giving to the new Muslims?

In order to answer this question, one needs to dive deeper into archival documents, Islamic law court taxes or petitions addressed to the sultan.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 191; Baer quotes here from Abdurrahman Abdi Pasha, “Osmanlı kanunnâmeleri,” *MİLLÎ TETEBBÜLAR MECMUASI* I, no.2 (Temmuz-Ağustos 1331/1912): 542.

¹⁰⁷ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 191-192.

¹⁰⁸ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 193.

2.2.2 *Kisve Bahasi* petitions

According to the scholar Minkov, the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions are crucial documentary source regarding the conversion to Islam in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Unlike to the information contained in the tax -registers, the petitions expressed the motive of conversion, so that we can relate with the feelings of the individuals that point out their reasons for their voluntary conversion to Islam. The function of the petitions was to mark a financial communication regarding the expenses assured by the treasury for the converts. However, the petitions, as Minkov states, are not seen as personal documents, rather as a product of the Ottoman chancery. *Kisve Bahasi* petitions belong to the Ottoman chancery genre of *arz-i hal*, or also known as *istida'a* or *ruk'a*.¹⁰⁹

Despite the straightforward and short construction of the petitions, we often find a paragraph with “identification”, with other words a brief story about the background of the petitioner and his/her reasons for conversion to Islam. In the section, the individual can express several reasons for conversion, such as:

- 1) Declaration of accepting Islam: the individual declares that accepts the new religion.
- 2) Renunciation of the former religion and embracing of Islam as the new religion of the individual.
- 3) Declaring that one is honoured with Islam.¹¹⁰

Minkov argues that the petitions with the section declaration of being honoured with Islam is performed by high-ranking Ottomans, such as the grand vizier, since, according to the scholar, the Ottoman sultans in the second half of the seventeenth century were not involved to that extent with state matters, therefore, Minkov argues that the sultan more likely was not present during the conversions (however, I will deliberate this later with Baer).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 110-111.

¹¹⁰ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 121-123.

¹¹¹ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670- 1730*, 124.

The social status of the individuals who wanted to convert, as the petitions show, were with higher social status in their *millet* groups or possessed skills and knowledge that were valuable for the empire. Some of them, in return for their conversion, requested from the sultan a position that can elevate or maintain their social prestige. For instance, a Jew, who was working in the craft of metal purifying, demanded the court, in exchange for his conversion, that he would be appointed as the head of the state mind.¹¹² Another example is a blind individual who is demanding for pension of several akçe, as a gift for his conversion to Islam.¹¹³ Moreover, one of the most intriguing cases of the petitions is a priest who converted to Islam, stating that he was from the "educated" people and he demanded that after his conversion his social status would continue by giving him a position in the palace, corresponding his qualifications.¹¹⁴

Age, gender, and marital status have as well a special place in the petitions in the "identification" paragraph. According to Minkov's data base of *Kisve Bahasi* the majority of the petitioners are adults (636 individuals or 84.2 percent) whereas only 119 (15.8 percent) were adolescents. Minkov assumes that based on his own researches most of the male who petitioned were between 12 and 20 years old. On the other side, the female petitioners 144 in total, 94 of them were adult women and 50 girls. Nevertheless, most of the youths, both male and female were mentioned together with their parent(s) who was/ were the initial petitioners for conversion.¹¹⁵

When it comes about the names, not all individuals indicated their pre-conversion name. The signed with the neutral formulation, such as *bende* ([your] servant), *nev müslim* (new Muslim) or simply with *bende-i nev müslim* (your servant, the new Muslim. For example, the Christian petitioner named Hristo, wanted to convert to Islam. In this example, the individual indicated pre-conversion name.¹¹⁶

Once converted, now the individual had to obtain a new Muslim name, most of them referred to to Mustafa, Ahmed, Ali, Mehmed, Ibrahim, Süleyman. For women, the

¹¹² NPTA XX 1\28 f. 26. See Appendix, Document 1. and Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 167.

¹¹³ NPTA XX 1\28, f.2. See Appendix, Document 2.

¹¹⁴ 1A\6808. See Appendix, Document 3 and Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 168.

¹¹⁵ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 170.

¹¹⁶ 1A\57265. See Appendix, Document 4.

choice was not that rich, for instance Ayşe, Fatma and others.¹¹⁷ For example, the blind petitioner, that I have discussed above, he did not indicate his pre-conversion name, however he accepted the name Süleyman for his new name as Muslim.¹¹⁸

Most of the petitioners originated from the Ottoman Balkans, where a great number of Christian population lived. In the collected data of Minkov, 60 petitioners referred to their place or region of origin, where 40 of them indicate Ottoman Balkans as their native region. We can refer to one example from the north-eastern Bulgaria, where one petitioner from the district Rustchuk desired to convert to Islam, and to be appointed as a part of the *sipahi* corps so that he could maintain his standard of living. However, he received, as far we understand from the petition, only clothing for his demand.¹¹⁹ Other petitioners were coming from the eastern part of the European part of Turkey or far north-east as Dobrudja or south-east (Greece without Morea).¹²⁰ Some of the voluntarily conversions were with pure economic means, so to say some of the petitioners converted in order to get a position in the palace. For example the Greek craftsman petitioner from Istanbul, who demanded to be appointed in the palace or elsewhere, in exchange for his conversion to Islam. The petition indicates that he was rewarded with clothing according to the customs of conversion, however, it is not explicitly written in the *Kisve Bahasi*, whether he was appointed somewhere.¹²¹ We can use the example with the blind individual who asked for pension in exchange for conversion. This is was a conversion motivated of economic difficulties, and the individual believed that the conversion might solve his unfavourable situation.¹²² Sometimes conversion was a saviour from troubles. For instance, a Greek girl desired to convert to Islam to escape undesired arranged marriage by her parents.¹²³

As we have seen from the primary sources *Kisve Bahasi* petitions for conversion to Islam addressed to the sultan provided by the scholar Minkov, the conversion were with voluntarily element. In addition, as we have seen, all of them are granted with clothing or money for their conversion, however, some of them even were granted with

¹¹⁷ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 172.

¹¹⁸ NPTA XX 1\28, f.2. See Appendix, Document 2.

¹¹⁹ CG 34\2, f.4. See Appendix, Document 5.

¹²⁰ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 179.

¹²¹ OAK 76\52, f.30. See Appendix, Document 6.

¹²² Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 182.

¹²³ 1\11011. See Appendix, Document 7. and Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 185.

the desired position. Therefore, as I argued previously in this chapter, I do believe that the conversions that occurred during the fifteenth and seventeenth century were voluntarily, specially under Mehmed IV, supported with the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions, however as we will see in the next section, Baer discovers a flaw in the Minkov's petitions.

A critique

The archival sources, the petitions to the sultan and the narrative sources from the Ottoman empire will complete the picture of the voluntarily conversion hypothesis that I am arguing in this work. Having mentioned the archival source of Baer concerning the statute from Abdi Pasha as my Independent variable for the conversions, I support it additionally with the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions to the sultan provided by Minkov as a second independent variable. However, Baer criticises Minkov for failing to prove that the conversions were voluntarily, since he did not used narrative sources as an auxiliary variable to his *Kisve Bahasi* petitions. Therefore, in this section I will briefly scan through the critics of Baer to Minkov and why he, according to Baer did not succeed to prove his thesis.

Later, I will analyse in a different section the narrative sources provided and analysed by Baer, as a completion to the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions of Minkov. I do acknowledge that Minkov's petitions do have their gaps however in order to fill them I use the narrative sources of Baer.

Based on records of the administration of cloaks and purses of coins for the new converts to Islam, the scholar Anton Minkov argues that most of the converts were motivated by economic reasons, and they were not that interested in their social advancement. Another scholar who also argued that voluntarily conversions were with pure economic reasons is Heath Lowry who argues that converts were choosing Islam, simply because it was cheaper to be Muslim, since Christians pay the *jizya* tax. The both scholars base their studies on archival documents of Ottoman bureaucrats who were not familiar in detail with conversions. Minkov and Lowry had to pay attention that in the case of petitions - the accounting of spendings was properly executed, in the case of court records that the Islamic and sultan law were properly implemented, and

in the tax surveys the proper recording of the taxable households.¹²⁴ Hence, referring to Minkov, since the Hanefi Islamic law stipulated that all the conversions that happen must be with voluntarily element. Thus, all Christians and Jews who converted, regardless of the circumstances that they were in, the administrator had to recorded the conversion, without choice as voluntarily.¹²⁵ As Baer emphasises, Minkov takes the petitions as his main evidence for his argument, claiming that since there is not indication in the petition of voluntarily conversion, he assumed that Christians converted voluntarily.¹²⁶ Baer points out that, Minkov came to this conclusion, simply because he did not read and include the narrative sources together with the archival documents, failing to comprehend the crucial relations between the narrative sources and the documents. Only using archival documents, argues Baer, it does not provide enough information for the circumstances that the converting individual was in.¹²⁷ Most of the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions give the information that giving of new clothes to converts who voluntarily wanted to change their religion, happened at the palace. Minkov argues, that these conversions plausibly happened during meetings of the imperial council at the palace, and that the sultan was not present.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, Baer points out that Minkov does not match the dates of the petitions with the journeys of Mehmed IV noted by his historian Abdi Pasha. If he had referred to the historian and matched the dates, he would have found out that most of these conversions happened during conversion ceremonies during military campaigns or hunting travels of Mehmed IV in Trace and Bulgaria.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 193.

¹²⁵ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 193.

¹²⁶ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 144.

¹²⁷ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 194.

¹²⁸ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 124.

¹²⁹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 194.

2.2.3 The narrative sources

As Baer pointed out, it is crucial to refer to the archival and narrative sources, in order to have the full picture of the conversion situation during the seventeenth century. During the second half of Mehmed IV's rule, the documentation of the distribution of clothes to converts had increased significantly. Moreover, the Ottoman archival sources prove that numerous Christians and Jews converted to Islam before the sultan and requested clothing and headgear to indicate for the religious change.¹³⁰ The petitions of the converts (*Kisve Bahasi*) together with the chronicle of Abdi Pasha provide evidences that most of the conversions occurred specially in Silistra and Rumelia regions where most of the hunting sessions of the sultan were, and secondly, while he was crossing through these regions for military campaigns.¹³¹

The first conversions of Christians accompanying Mehmed IV in his hunting trips were traceable around the middle of 1660.¹³² Moreover, between 1660 and 1670 conversions occurred as well while the sultan was traveling from Dimetoka and Tirhala to Yenişehir to campaign against the Commonwealth of Poland.¹³³

However, most of the conversions took place in Bulgaria. Hajji Ali Efendi, who was charged to record all the resting stations on Mehmed IV's first campaign in 1672, indicated that in the district of Silistra, number of Christian peasants were prepared to convert, after the hunt session of the sultan. Furthermore, more conversions of Christians to Islam occurred during the second campaign of Mehmed IV in his imperial tent in the resting stations in the province of Silistra. Hajji Ali Efendi, noted also in 1672, that in one of the imperial halting stations in the province of Karinabad, which was only six day journey from Edirne, lived group of adults and children who converted together to Islam in Istanbul at the court in the end of Mehmed IV's rule.¹³⁴ The entourage of Mehmed IV always had officials who took, stored and maintained the precious cloaks, during travels or hunting trips, due to the fact that, whenever the

¹³⁰ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 194.

¹³¹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 195.

¹³² Here Baer refers to BOA, Ali Emiri Tasnifi, Mehmed IV: 99II, April II, 1667.

¹³³ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 195.

¹³⁴ Here Baer refers to Hajji Ali Efendi, *Fethname-i Kamaniça*, fol. 10b

sultan was traveling or hunting, there were always conversions before him which recorded by the imperial secretary, and celebrated festively.¹³⁵

Since the *millet* system divided the Ottoman subjects into confessional groups, the Muslims were distinguishing themselves from the rest with white turban. Therefore, for the converted Muslims, it was crucial to receive clothing in order to symbolise the change of the religious group. “The Statute of the New Muslim” of Abdi Efendi does not provide any detail of what type of clothing should one Christian or Jew wear in order to become a Muslim. For instance, three legal opinions from the late seventeenth century SheikhuIslam Yahya Efendi Minkarizade highlights the clothing in the conversion as a central role for Christians and Jews.

He states that:

Question: If a Christian or Jew should wear a white turban on his head and henceforth say, “I became a Muslim,” is his or her conversion to islam considered valid?

Answer: It is.

Question: A Christian or Jew wears a white turban on his head. After he became completely embellished by Islam, when two Muslims ask, “what are you?” if he should say, “I am a Muslim,” is his conversion to Islam considered valid?

Answer: It is.

Question: When a Christian or Jew wears a white turban on his head he is asked, “why did you wear it, have you become a Muslim?” If he should say, “I have been a Muslim for a long time,” is his conversion to Islam considered valid?

Answer: It is.¹³⁶

From the seen above, we can conclude that a Christian or a Jew, who is wearing a white turban could change his status as means of conversion to Islam. Individuals who appeared before the court with the means to convert to Islam, removed their former dress and took the new clothing as a symbol of acceptance of the empire’s privileged religion.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 197.

¹³⁶ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 198. Baer referee here to Yahya b. Ömer Minkarizade, *Fetāvā*, fols. 34a-b.

¹³⁷ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 198.

Here I want to emphasise that despite the “The Statute of the new Muslim” of Abdi Pasha which indicates that most of the converts were male, I want to refer to some other sources that indicate conversion of women to Islam as well. For instance the “clothing” for conversion of female consisted of slippers and cloaks.¹³⁸ The petitions recorded by the imperial council regarding the awarding of clothes, show that around 200 people converted before the grand vizier or the sultan. Mostly were men, with Orthodox Christian religion. Two-third of these individuals were male between 2 and 50 years old. The second largest group of converts was made up by single men. Lastly, smaller groups of families and women, mostly mothers and daughters appeared before the court to convert.

However, as Baer argues, these recorder conversions are a small portion of what probably occurred in this time, since some of the conversions happened orally and were not recorded. Furthermore, the Oriental Department of the National Library in Sofia provides Ottoman arrival sources for Christian males who converted during the hunting trips of Mehmed IV.¹³⁹

For instance, between 1679 and 1680, twenty- two men and two women together with one girl converted to Islam before the sultan while he was in a hunt trip in Trace.¹⁴⁰

Cloaking converts was an important symbol for showing Mehmed IV’s legitimacy, prestige and power at times where sultans became marginal, isolated and only symbolic representatives of power. With the piety of Mehmed IV, and the conversion ceremonies, the sultan opted to impress his subjects and his opposites, who opposed his rule, since they thought that he would be the next symbolic representation of the dynasty. In times of great anxiety, caused by political instability, the temporary victories of the military and the economic crises, Mehmed IV sought for stability and social balance and openly celebrated these Christians and Jews who joined Islam by

¹³⁸ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 200.

¹³⁹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 200-201.

¹⁴⁰ Here Baer refers to *Sources ottomanes sur les processus d’Islamization aux Balkans*. Traduction des documents A. Velkov et al, Série sources -2 (Sofia: Éditions de l’Académie bulgare des sciences, 1990), 35-37.

awarding them with clothes and money. As a result, the religion became a mediator for regulating the social order covered under the symbol of clothes.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 201-202.

Chapter 3

The Afterlives of the Conversion Process in Bulgaria

The complicated ethnic and religious landscape of the Balkan Peninsula has been challenging the unity and stability of the Balkan population since the 19th century. The discourse of the Balkan Muslims is based on complex identity system of interdependence that contains different variables such as language, culture, ethnicity, religion and geographical position that create and sustain a collective sense of solidarity.¹⁴² The first steps of defining a national identity, the Balkan nations began to conceptualise a national framework based on an ethnic idea of a nation with a strong reference to the language. As a result, the national identity in the Balkan Peninsula during the 20th century was associated primarily with national identity based on language.¹⁴³

Bulgaria and Greece were among those countries from the Balkan Peninsula, who after gaining independence from the Ottoman empire in 19th century, created a linguistically-cultural unified nation-state concept, which eliminates any other cultural diversity within the state by using different mechanisms such as migration, population exchange and assimilation of the nation's ethnic groups.¹⁴⁴ For instance, after signing the peace treaty of Lausanne in 1923, Greece and Turkey exchanged population.¹⁴⁵ However, the Bulgarian approach towards its Turkish minority group developed differently, namely by expelling Turks in several migration waves since its independence in 1878 and went for name changing assimilation known as the “Revival Process” of the remained Muslim minority (Turkish, Pomaks and Muslim Gypsies) in 1984 and 1985.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Strashko Stoyanovski, “The Balkan Muslim discourse: Identity among the Muslims of Slavic origin”, *New Balkan Politics* 17 (2015): 70.

¹⁴³ Stoyanovski, “The Balkan Muslim discourse”, 71.

¹⁴⁴ Ali Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4-5.

¹⁴⁵ Biray Kolluoğlu, “Excesses of Nationalism: Greco-Turkish population exchange,” *Nations and Nationalism* 19 (2013): 534-535.

¹⁴⁶ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 6.

The Bulgarian government was not always hostile to its Muslim minority. After coming to power in 1945, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) restored the minority rights of the Turks and Pomaks and gave them the opportunity for socialist integration. Nevertheless, the socialist commitment of the Muslims did not provide the expected result and therefore the Communist party began its gradual forced assimilation of name-changing policies and expelling ethnic Turks to Turkey.

Supported by falsified evidences and reshaped history from Bulgarian academics, specially the scholar Hristo Hristov, who argued that conversion to Islam during the Ottoman empire was forced and that Turks and Pomaks were actually Bulgarians, yet forcibly converted to Islam and lost their Bulgarian identity, the Communist party could justify its assimilation policy and continue with the Bulgarisation of Turks and Pomaks.¹⁴⁷ The conversion concept of Hristov provoked an ongoing debate, specially between socialist academicians and the new scholars after 1989 whether the conversions were forced or not. For instance, the scholars Ali Eminov and Vera Mutaſchieva argue that the forced conversion concept to Islam was instrumentalized from the Bulgarian Communist party for its own communist nationalistic aspirations

¹⁴⁸

This chapter analyses the ongoing academic debate whether conversion in Bulgaria was forced or not. However, before contributing to the debate, I would define the concept of nationalism with the authors Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, in order to understand how nationalism was shaped in Bulgaria in terms of minorities. Then I will explain the assimilation policy of the Bulgarian communist regime, with a special regard to the “Revival Process”. As a final part of the chapter I will contribute to the debate and contradict the scholar Hristov with my own research based on the scholars Eminov, Baer, Mutaſchieva and Minkov that the conversion to Islam under the Ottoman empire was not coerced.

¹⁴⁷ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 13-15.

¹⁴⁸ Vera Mutaſchieva, “The Turk, the Jew and the Gypsy,” in *Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria*, ed. Antonina Zheliazkova and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Sofia: IMIR, 1994), 34.

3.1.A theoretical approach to nationalism

The idea of a nation has been a widespread desire for self legitimacy and remains a great uniting factor for people. Thus, nationalism has been one of the secular ideologies that has driven people to undertake a political action during the last two hundred years, it has succeeded to survive and continues to be the most popular ideology today. Despite its uniting element, however, nationalism has been often a cause for disintegration of multi-ethnic states and empires, as well as a main trigger for increased tensions and conflicts between different ethnic groups.¹⁴⁹

As alternative to nationalism, various attempts have been made to create and organise a political system based on universal principles, however, the former has generally failed. For instance, the Marxist-Leninist ideology of class concept in former communist countries was the fundamental uniting factor. For the concept, the ethnic divisions in one state did not play any crucial role, it was essential to the class idea that all differences such as languages and ethnic groups to be treated equally. Nevertheless, the former Marxist-Leninist countries failed to recognise the importance of the ethnic-idea as a self-identity factor in a modern world. Therefore, by exaggeration of class concept, power divisions and lack of profound understanding of ethnicity as a self-determination element, all of them led to the collapse of the socialist dream and strengthened nationalist aspirations in the former soviet space and communist countries.¹⁵⁰

For the definition of nationalism in this chapter, I will refer to the scholar Ernest Gellner, who defines nationalism as a “theory of political legitimacy which requires that ethnical boundaries should not cut across political ones and, in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state should not separate the power-holders from the rest”.¹⁵¹ In other words, he argues that the rulers and the ruled should not be from different groups, but from the same one.¹⁵²

Nationalism could be divided in abstract and practical form. For instance, the abstract form of nationalism advocates for universal understanding of ethnicity where

¹⁴⁹ Stanley Hoffman, “Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity,” *Atlantica* 272, no.2 (1993): 101.

¹⁵⁰ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 1.

¹⁵¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.

¹⁵² Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 2.

individuals who identify themselves with this concept have unbiased approach of nationalism, so to say they do not favour one nationality over another. As Gellner point out that the concept of abstract nationalism allows all nations to have their own political rule.¹⁵³ This liberal approach of nationalism has its roots in the French Revolution where the distribution of power between the state and the citizen are equal. Needles to say that the main pillar in the liberal nationalism (abstract form) is the citizen who participates actively in the state politics. In reality, however, nationalists failed to imply fully the reasonable and rational principles of liberal nationalism and therefore a second form emerged, namely the practical nationalism (the romantic-ethnic nationalism) with roots in nineteenth century German romanticism.¹⁵⁴ The concept of practical nationalism is that each state belongs to a certain ethnic nation where the latter has a privileged position within the state. In addition to that, the romantic concept defines further that the existence of various ethnic groups in a single state might lead to tensions and instability, therefore a state shall be with single ethnic composition.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the romantic nationalists reject the Enlightenment and French rationalism arguing that the fulfilment of the liberal idea of nationalism is impossible, due to the fact that societies are united not by a constitution, rather by a natural sense of unification that dominates the political constitutional unity. As the scholar Hans Kohn argues that romantic nationalists advocate for a perfect national community where individuals ought to be integral part of the nation in order to fulfil their individual existence. Therefore, a society or a member of it, does not need a legal constitutional bound, but an organic social structure.¹⁵⁶ However, the romantic nationalist concept is to a great extent rigid in terms of adapting itself to the modern world and it has often led to hyper nationalism and xenophobic extremism which results mostly in dangerous political policies.

One may refer to many examples from the history, such as the Nazism in Germany, the ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia, various ethnic confrontations in the former

¹⁵³ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1-2.

¹⁵⁴ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 45.

¹⁵⁵ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 45.

¹⁵⁶ Hans Kohn, "Nationalism," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* 3, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 327.

soviet space and the expulsions of Turks from Bulgaria that resulted from the consequences of hyper nationalism in the twentieth century.¹⁵⁷

Yet, how one can define nationalism within the understanding of a state and a nation? In the understanding of nationalism, a nation and a state are independent elements, however, as Gellner points out “either or without the other is incomplete, and constitutes a tragedy”.¹⁵⁸ Yet, how a state and a nation emerged? The concept of nationalism does not recognise the contingent character of the state and nation.

In contrast, Gellner convinces successfully through a profound historical analytical approach of the emerge of nations and states, that the former and the latter resulted form a contingency.¹⁵⁹ In addition to that, a state, defined by its administrative apparatus with nationalist agenda, might seek to become a nation state with one language, one culture and common values, or simply adjusting its political apparatus to match its cultural boundaries.¹⁶⁰

As the scholar Bette Denich analyses, in the South Slavic languages¹⁶¹ in the Balkan Peninsula, the word *narod* has the same meaning for “nation” and “people”.

Thereby, the understanding of *narod* could explain both “nation” and “people” as one ethnic population and this concept does not allow the possibility that nationalism can be instrumentalized for citizenship, or even to be chosen, disregarding the ancestry.¹⁶²

However, the above mentioned concept of ethnic population is very often confused with ethnic identity. The definition of the latter is quite often a subject of debate between those who define it according to essentialism and those who follow the instrumentalist principles and constructivism. The essentialism defines the ethnic identity as an objective nature made up by group of identities which are resistant to change and are fixed, whereas the constructivists or instrumentalist principles scrutinise the specifics of an ethnicity as an individual choice. The ethnic identities, in

¹⁵⁷ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 3.

¹⁵⁸ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Kathryn Woolard, *Double Talk: Bilingualism and the Politics of Ethnicity in Catalonia* (California: Stanford University Press, 1989), 10.

¹⁶¹ In the linguistic groups of South Slavic languages are included: Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian and Slovene.

¹⁶² Bette Denich, “Unmaking multi-ethnicity in Yugoslavia: metamorphosis observed,” *Anthropology of East Europe Rivew* 11, no.1 and 2 (1993): 45-46.

contrast to ethnic population, are fluid and they can change according to the social environment and to a subjective assessment of a given community of individuals or groups of circumstances at a given place and time. Furthermore, on the assumption that better alternatives or circumstances for social and economical advancement are in disposal outside of one's ethnical group, as a result, individuals from this group will use this alternatives to modify their ethnic identity in order to suit different conditions.¹⁶³ As a result, members of a given group or community are with flexible identity, with other words they have multiple identities, each of them are appropriately chosen for the given condition or circumstances. Hence, as the scholar Benedict Anderson argues that nations are “imagined communities” not necessarily constructed on “objective facts” that can be traced to the initial begin in the past.¹⁶⁴ For instance, referring to the ethnic identities in the Balkan Peninsula, the scholar John Fine argues through analyses of medieval and pre-Modern sources that there has been fluidity of ethnic identity's on the territory of modern Croatia. Moreover, most of the people who lived there during the 19th century identified themselves as Slavs, but not as Croatians. Other groups continued to identify themselves as Dalmatians where a new identity group, at the same time was emerging, namely the Slavonian ethnic identity. Therefore, in terms of entering the modern period, the local population of the above mentioned region had many opportunities to be ethnic fluid and to choose their identity according to the social architecture of the region.¹⁶⁵

Having seen Gellner's analyses on nationalism, the linguistic approach of Denich, and the ethnic identity and fluidity of nations according to Anderson, now I can analyse one of the main elements of this chapter, namely the Bulgarian understanding of nationalism and its approach to it. From the above seen, I completely agree that the concept of Gellner for nationalism is adequately applicable to the Bulgarian case.

¹⁶³ Ali Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities: Pomaks in Bulgaria,” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 6, no.2 (2007): 1.

¹⁶⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso Books, 1991), 1-15. and Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities,” 1-4.

¹⁶⁵ John Fine, *When ethnicity did not matter in the Balkans: a study in identity in pre-nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia in the Medieval and Early- Modern periods* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 556.

The ethnic self-determination in Bulgaria, was not a personal choice, but state politics. The ethnic identity as self determination was a tool of state policies, a variable with “changing definition of what constitutes the state”.¹⁶⁶

The political policies in Bulgaria, after gaining its independence from the Ottoman empire between late 19th and early 20th century, were concentrated on formation of a culturally, linguistically and territorially united single nation-state by decreasing the ethnic and cultural diversity through assimilation or voluntarily as well as forced migration of ethnic minorities. For the Bulgarian nationalists during this period, it was paramount to create a concept of nationalism that would unite the Bulgarians and strengthen the single ethnic- nation composition. Thus, Bulgarian scholars created, despite the historical evidence, an overemphasised ideal of Bulgarian nationalism referring to the early Bulgarian medieval states who were ethnically and religiously homogenous.¹⁶⁷ This ideal of nationalism would become a crucial concept that would be used from the newly established Bulgarian state after 1878 to restore that ethnic and religious homogeneity of the First Bulgarian empire (between 7th and 11th century) by creating a nation with Bulgarian ethnic self determination, with a single language and Bulgarian orthodoxy. Nevertheless, this concept would impede the cultural and ethnic diversity of different religious and linguistic groups, who did not share the same religion or did not speak Bulgarian were excluded from the integration process.¹⁶⁸

Further steps were taken to strengthen the sense of Bulgarian nationalism, namely idealisation of the pre - Ottoman Bulgaria and stigmatisation of Ottoman heritage. In addition, the nationalists argue that the Ottomans hampered the development of the Bulgarian culture and identity and they even defined the Ottoman period as “dark times” and “yoke”. Nevertheless, the newly established Bulgarian state had another challenge, namely how to deal with the afterlives of the Ottoman empire such as the remained Turkish population, other Muslim groups, the Ottoman elements in the Bulgarian culture and finally the Ottoman mosques and religious schools.¹⁶⁹

Destroying and transforming of Ottoman architecture, gradual migration waves and expulsion of Turks to Turkey would be one of the integration approaches of minority

¹⁶⁶ Denich, “Unmaking multi-ethnicity in Yugoslavia,” 47.

¹⁶⁷ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 4.

¹⁶⁸ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 5.

¹⁶⁹ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 5.

groups in Bulgaria, however, the peak of the migration and assimilation policy would have been the attempt of forced assimilation agenda of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), where Muslim groups, specially the Turks would be “absorbed” to the dominant Bulgarian culture by reshaping their identity, yet it failed.¹⁷⁰

3.2 The Pomak question

As we have seen above, the ethnic identity could be fluid and does not have a fix element. It can be reformulated, manipulated and changed.¹⁷¹ The same can be counted for the *Pomak* identity in Bulgaria and Greece. In this subchapter I will analyse the Slavic Speaking Muslims in Bulgaria and Greece as Ottoman afterlives in the Balkan Peninsula. Their identity and origin have been contested from several states and nations that questioned their historical development and connections to the Ottomans. The question of their origins mostly relates to conversion process during the Ottoman rule and whether they were forcibly converted to Islam, and allowed to keep their language or simply conversed to Islam voluntarily. However, this question I will analyse later. The Pomak identity, despite being contested, has survived and resulted in ethnic fluidity in terms of self determination.

As definition for the *Pomaks*, I will refer to the scholar Hugh Poulton who defines the former as “Slavic Bulgarians who speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue, but whose religion and customs are Islamic”¹⁷². This definition is mostly accepted among Balkan academicians, except if they do not bind themselves with other ideological nationalist concepts.

The Pomaks in Bulgaria represent one of the three major Muslims groups, after Turks and Roma Muslims. They live in small, compact villages in the central and western Rhodope Mountains of southern Bulgaria, in Western Trace of northern Greece. Estimating the exact number of Pomaks in the region is difficult, due to the fact that

¹⁷⁰ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 6.

¹⁷¹ Tone Bringa, “Nationality categories, national identification and identity formation in ‘multinational’ Bosnia,” *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 11 (1993): 70.

¹⁷² Hugh Poulton, *The Balkans: minorities and states in conflict* (London: Minority Rights Group Publications, new ed. 1993), 111.

in Greece in the national census they are counted as part of the Turkish minority, and in Bulgaria, the ethnic identity of the Bulgarian speaking Muslims is to a great extent problematic, since some of them identify themselves as Turks, some as Bulgarian Muslims, namely Pomaks. Speaking with numbers, according to the census results in Bulgaria in 2001, 131,531 ethnic Bulgarians identify their religion affiliation as Muslims, however we do not know the exact number of the Pomak group.¹⁷³ In Greece, however, the estimated number of Pomaks has been counted to 40 000 people.¹⁷⁴

Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria have contested the identity of Pomaks very often where each of these countries is claiming its own version for the origins of the Pomaks. For instance, Greek academicians argue that the Bulgarian Slavic Speaking Muslims are descendants of ancient Thracian tribes, who gradually and voluntarily were Slavicized, Latinized and Hellenized. They were converted firstly to Christianity and later through the Ottomans into Islam. In addition, Greek historians argue further that Pomaks use some ancient Greek words in order to proof their Hellenic origin.¹⁷⁵ However, the scholar Eminov points out that the Pomaks speak Bulgarian dialect filled with many archaic Turkish words, which on the other side contradicts the thesis of the Greek historians.¹⁷⁶ In contrast to Greece, most of the Bulgarian scholars based their concept on linguistic evidence that since Pomaks speak Bulgarian dialect with various ancient Bulgarian construction, the scholars argue that Pomaks must have been with Bulgarian origin. The aspect of Islam, however, is given to the fact that Bulgaria was under Ottoman empire for 500 years, the Bulgarian scholars, therefore, argue that they must have been forced to convert to Islam. They base their hypothesis on the pre-Christian and Christian elements in the culture and customs of Pomaks.¹⁷⁷

Turkish scholars, on the other hand, have disregarded their cultural and linguistic elements, and argue therefore that it is Islam that identifies Pomaks as Turks. The concept traces back the origins of Pomaks to the descendants of different Turkic peoples who apparently settled in the Balkans before the arrival of the Ottomans and

¹⁷³ the data is available at https://www.nsi.bg/census_e/census_e.htm

¹⁷⁴ Mario Apostolov, "The Pomaks: A Religious Minority in the Balkans," *Nationalities Papers* 24 (1996): 728.

¹⁷⁵ Tatjana Seyppel, "The Pomaks of Northeastern Greece: an endangered Balkan population," *Journal of Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 10 (1989): 42.

¹⁷⁶ Eminov, "Social Construction of Identities," 8.

¹⁷⁷ Carol Silverman, "Pomaks," in *Moslem Peoples: A world ethnographic survey*, ed. by R. Weekers, (Westport: Greenwood Press, second edition, 1989), 614.

converted to Islam. Furthermore, when the Ottomans were on their peak to conquer the Balkans in the middle of the 14th century, they found a local Muslim support- namely the Pomaks. Hence, the Christian Bulgarians called the latter “pomagač” or collaborator of the Turks which according to the scholar Maria Todorova, the name Pomaks derives from “pomagač”¹⁷⁸. As a result, Turkish scholars believe that that Turks and Pomaks are not only sharing the same religion, but also, the latter represents the ‘pure Turks’ identifying the oldest Turkish population in the region.¹⁷⁹

Despite the fact that Pomaks are accepted as Bulgarian Slavic Muslims, the Bulgarian government, after its independence of the Ottomans between late 19th and early 20th century, did not embrace their Islamic heritage and did not integrate them fully to the newly formed state. It took considerable time for the Bulgarian government to distinguish Pomaks from the Turks as Muslim minority group and to integrate them separately to the Bulgarian society.¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, as I will analyse later in this chapter, the attempts of integration were controversial and brutal, which led to the complete confusion with the Pomaks identity in the late 70s. of the 20th century.¹⁸¹

3.3 The assimilation policies and the “Revival Process”

3.3.1 Minority policies between 1878 and 1945

The first presence of Turks might have begun in the Balkan Peninsula in the early thirteenth century. Nevertheless, with the begin of the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, the first serious settlements of Turks took place in Bulgaria and in the rest region of the Peninsula during the fourteenth century, and it increased during the Ottoman period in the region. The Turkish migration to the Peninsula reached its peak in middle of the nineteenth century, where a great number of Circassians of Caucasus and Tatars from Crimea settled in the territories of modern Romania and Bulgaria.

¹⁷⁸ Maria Todorova, “Identity (trans)formation among Pomaks in Bulgaria,” in *The Myth of ‘Ethnic Conflict’: Politics, Economics, and ‘Cultural’ Violence*, ed. Beverly Crawford and Ronnie D. Lipschutz (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley, 1998), 480-481.

¹⁷⁹ Seyppel, “The Pomaks of Northeastern Greece,” 43.

¹⁸⁰ Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities,” 9.

¹⁸¹ Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities,” 13.

However, with the various uprisings and revolts in the Ottoman Balkans, the Empire lost significant portion of its European territories, where in the all political turmoil new states were created, among them was the newly established Bulgarian Kingdom in the nineteenth century. During the first years of the independence from the Ottomans, the Turkish population began to emigrate to the southern parts of the Peninsula, and in the early twentieth century to Anatolia and Asia Minor.¹⁸²

After the end of the Russo-Ottoman war and signing the Berlin treaty, the rights of the Muslim minority groups in Bulgaria, in particular the Turks were recognised and granted. The Ottoman empire attempted to preserve and guarantee as well the right of the Turks in the Bulgarian Kingdom.¹⁸³ That resulted in accordance of the minority policies of Bulgaria with the Berlin treaty and the Bulgarian government had to grant rights to Turks, Pomaks and Roma Muslims to practise Islam, visit their religious institutions, to wear their traditional clothes and to learn their mother tongues, for instance Turkish for the Turks. Nevertheless, with the disastrous Balkan wars (1912-1913) and the First World War, a new migration wave took place. where in total, approximately 140 000 Turks left Bulgaria for Turkey in the period between 1878 and 1913.¹⁸⁴ Despite the rights granted to the Muslim minorities in Bulgaria to be treated equally to Bulgarians, in the period of the two Balkan wars, Pomaks and Turks were still subjected to discriminatory policies.¹⁸⁵ Turkish schools and religious institutions were very often targeted from the Bulgarian authorities to assimilation policies where Turks and other Muslim groups were prevented to use their mother tongue in full capacity.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, the first assimilation attempts of Pomaks took place in the southern parts of the Rhodopi Mountains where the government launched campaign of conversion into Orthodox Christianity. It is very important to emphasise that it was only during the 20s, and in particular during the 30s in the last century, that Pomaks were officially recognised as Bulgarians which resulted in a heated press campaign urging public opinion to distinguish between religious and ethnical identity and to accept Pomaks as an integral part of the Bulgarian society.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² İpek Nedim, *Rumeli'den Anadolu 'ya Türk Göçleri, 1877-1890* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1994), 21-22.

¹⁸³ Ömer E. Lütem, *Türk-Bulgar İlişkileri 1983-1989, C.I, 1983-1985* (Ankara: ASAM, 2001), 59.

¹⁸⁴ Bilal Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri* (İstanbul: Bilgi, 2012), 63.

¹⁸⁵ Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 63- 64.

¹⁸⁶ Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 65.

¹⁸⁷ Todorova, "Identity (trans)formations among Pomaks in Bulgaria," 476.

In the Détente period, after the First World War, the minority rights of the Turks improved, since they were an important labour force in the agriculture section which supported the Bulgarian economy and its recovery from the war. Moreover, the minority rights of the Turks were further improved with the new government led by the Agrarian Party with the leader Alexander Stamboliysky who developed and stabilised the relations between the Turkish minority and Bulgarians. Under his government, the Muslim minority enjoyed less discrimination towards their religious affiliation and traditional clothing, and the Turkish schools reopened again and remained unbothered from the authorities.¹⁸⁸ However, after coup d'état in 1934, the new government led by Damian Velchev - Kimon Georgiev took another radical approach towards its Turkish minority policies. In a massive campaign, the government changed the Turkish names of most of the villages into Bulgarian ones and having reformed the administration, two-third of the names of Turkish places were renamed into Bulgarian ones.¹⁸⁹ Turkish schools were closed and Turkish religious institutions were subjected to strict governmental control. After the government of Kimon- Georgiev in 1935, the Bulgarian Tsar Boris III had greater authority in the government, however, the radical minority policies remained. A language-based identity was introduced to Pomaks by the movement Rodina (Motherland) during the late 1930s and early 1940s where the Bulgarian language became the worship language in the Pomak mosques, the *Qur'an* was translated into Bulgarian, in order to create a Muslim religious institution specially designed for the Bulgarian speaking Muslims, separated from the Turkish ones. Moreover, the government encouraged the creation of a local elite by enrolling Bulgarian speaking Muslims into secondary and higher education institutions.¹⁹⁰ The government implemented additional measures to the assimilation program by eliminating the traditional clothes, specially for Pomak women and implementing gradual name changing policy from Turkish to Bulgarian ones. Two-third of the Pomaks living in the central Rhodope Mountains changed their names between 1942 and 1944. As one can expect, the integration policies of the government and the Rodina movement did

¹⁸⁸ Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 65.

¹⁸⁹ Milena Mahon, "The Turkish minority under Communist Bulgaria- Politics of Ethnicity and Power," *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 1, no.2 (1999): 154.

¹⁹⁰ Todorova, "Identity (trans)formations among Pomaks in Bulgaria," 476.

not bring any further result, in contrary, it created resistance from Pomaks towards the government.¹⁹¹ The situation remained unchanged till the fall of the Bulgarian government in 1944 when the armed forces of the red army entered Bulgaria and established a new government led by Simeon Georgieff. The Rodina movement was prohibited based on the grounds for being a reactionary nationalist organisation, the Muslim names of the Pomaks were restored in 1945 and Turks regained their rights. From this moment on, Bulgaria became People's Republic under the long rule of the communist party.^{192 193}

3.3.2 Minority policies between 1950 and 1975

The existence of the minority groups was constitutionally acknowledged in the first years of the communist rule in Bulgaria between 1945 and 1950. It is important, however, to highlight that in the very beginning of its rule, the communist party supported and envisaged further development of the minority rights of the Muslims, believing that the Turks, Roma Muslims and Pomaks would develop a sense of Bulgarian socialist-self determination, and together with the class concept of nationalism they would voluntarily overcome the religious and the ethnic identity, for a certain period of time.¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the socialist self-determination policy did not justify the expectations. With the solid support of the minority institutions, despite the active communist propaganda, the result from the socialist integration policies strengthened, rather weakened the ethnic and religious identity of the Muslim minority.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, the communist government had to face another challenge, namely the contested identity of Pomaks. After the unsuccessful Bulgarian socialist-self determination campaign in the Rhodope Mountains organised by the party between 1948 and 1952, the government had to take a radical approach, namely to induce Pomaks to change their names (an approach that Pomaks experienced already), to give up on their religion and to become an integral part of the Socialist state of Bulgaria. Those who resisted the assimilation campaign, were displaced to the central

¹⁹¹ Eminov, "Social Construction of Identities," 10.

¹⁹² Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 183.

¹⁹³ Eminov, "Social Construction of Identities," 10.

¹⁹⁴ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 7.

¹⁹⁵ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 7-8.

parts of Bulgaria, far from their native surroundings, in order to weaken their unity. However, Pomaks who were under the assimilation pressure, many among them accepted the Turkish identity in order to preserve their Muslim identity and customs. In addition to them, Roma Muslims joined the Turkish identity with the same purpose. This tendency of assimilation or so to call it voluntarily Turkification was seen from the communist party as a danger to the establishment of the single-nation state, in particular, with socialist elements.¹⁹⁶ As a result, in the Plenum of the Communist Party in April 1956, the government approved counteract measures against this tendency of Turkification. The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences was requested from the communist government to undertake various filed studies in Rhodopes and Central Bulgaria, as well as wide-ranging researches to discover the historical truth of the assimilation actions of the Ottomans oppressors concerning the individual and mass conversions to Islam, in order to prove the Bulgarian origins of Pomaks.^{197 198} In addition to it, the communist government adopted the document “ Measures Against the Self-Determination of Gypsies, Tatars, and Bulgarians Professing the Mohamedan Religion” in April 1962, stipulating that all Turco-Arabic names had to be changed into Bulgarian ones, the Pomak children are though only in Bulgarian at schools, preventing Turkish and Pomak children to share same dormitories or study groups.¹⁹⁹ Soon, after implementing the document, Pomaks were forced to change their names into Bulgarian ones and were forced to give up on their religious affiliation. However, the assimilation resulted in brutal resistance and political instability in the southern parts of Bulgaria. The government was obliged to put down the campaign and names were restored. Nevertheless, the Politburo reaffirmed the necessity of name changing campaign and prohibition of traditional Muslim clothing in 1970.²⁰⁰ The campaign was carried out with iron fist between 1971 and 1973 where all Pomaks were subjected to change forcibly their names. The argument of the party for executing this decision was to grant Bulgarian speaking Muslims with the opportunity to return to their origins, namely giving them Bulgarian names, in order to give them the possibility of

¹⁹⁶ Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities,” 11.

¹⁹⁷ Theodore Zang and Lois Whitman, *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Gypsies of Bulgaria*,” *Helsinki Watch* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991): 72-73.

¹⁹⁸ Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities,” 12.

¹⁹⁹ Zang and Whitman, “Destroying Ethnic Identity,” 72-73.

²⁰⁰ Kiril Kertikov, “The Ethnic Nationality Problem in Bulgaria (1944-1981),” *Bulgarian Quarterly* 1, no.3 (1991): 83-84.

full sense of belonging to the Bulgarian nation. In reality, the reason behind this action was to prevent further conversion to the Turkish identity and to absorb Pomaks into the dominant Bulgarian ethnicity. During the name change campaign, hundreds were arrested and sent to concentration camps. In the end, the assimilation policy of Pomaks was successful in terms of name changing campaign, however, the identity of Pomaks remained mixed, with other words some of them accepted the Bulgarian identity, others maintained the Pomak identity.²⁰¹

When it comes to the Turkish minority, the former was not excluded from the severe assimilation policies of the government. In the Turkish schools, Bulgarian became the only instructing language in the secondary and higher educational institutions. Turkish language was replaced by Bulgarian as well in the teaching- training establishments and the appointment of Turkish teachers in Pomak schools was prohibited. As a results, all these measures led to the end of the Turkish educational instructors and institutions in Bulgaria.²⁰² In the beginning of the 1970s, the religious institutions such as mosques and schools were closed, and the remained ones were used as museums. However, the communist party did not cease to implement the socialist propaganda to the Turks. Therefore, the remained religious leaders, namely *imams* were recruited as state agents to report to the party whether the socialist agenda was fulfilled among the members of the Turkish minority. Nevertheless, having seen that the Turks were refusing to become part of the local socialist structures or excluding themselves from the socialist lifestyle, the government needed a new political discourse and constitutional language.²⁰³

Thus, in the constitutional changes made in 1971, the Bulgarian government did not mention any presence of minorities, on contrary, the government argued that “only Bulgarians” were in the People’s Republic. The following mass propaganda in newspapers, schools and television using the concept of united socialist nation of Bulgaria paved the communist commitment of ethnic homogeneity in the following years. The Turks, on the other hand, would feel the brutality of the party for paying the price of Bulgarian ethnic homogeneity.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities,” 12.

²⁰² Kiril Kertikov, “The Ethnic Nationality Problem in Bulgaria (1944-1981), 83.

²⁰³ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 9.

²⁰⁴ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 10.

3.3.3 The “Revival Process” between 1984 and 1985

As we have seen from the above, the assimilation policy of Bulgaria towards its Muslim minorities was gradual and planned, however, it was the communist government who strengthened the assimilation process towards the Pomaks in Turks.²⁰⁵ In this subchapter I will analyse the final step of the assimilation of Turks, the so called “Revival Process” where the Turks had to be “converted” to the Bulgarian identity in order to accomplish a full one ethnic-nation concept. The falsely created evidences for justification of the “Revival Process” from the communist party have created a heated debate among the Bulgarian academicians, specially after the fall of the Bulgarian communist regime in 1989, since it speculates the origin of Pomaks and Turks in the Ottoman Balkans and that they were forcibly converted into Islam.²⁰⁶

After the brutal name changing campaign of Pomaks between 1971 and 1973, the prohibition of Turkish language as a second education language, and the closure of mosques and religious schools, the final step was to implement the name- changing campaign for the Turks. According to the scholar Eminov, one of the main reasons for the assimilation policy was the demographic issue.

After the Second World War, while Bulgaria was rebuilding its own state with the new socialist agenda, the Muslim minorities, specially the Turks, were growing rapidly, whereas Bulgarians were experiencing a slow population growth. Demographers assumed that by 1990s, the ethnic Bulgarian population would experience zero growth rate, or even a negative rate, unlikely to its Muslim minorities. As a result, the communist party had to face a challenge to increase the ethnic Bulgarian birth rate and to balance the dominant ethnic position of Bulgarians. In other words, the demographic reason for assimilation of Turks, according to Eminov, was the efforts of the party to balance the population growth rate in advantage of ethnic Bulgarians, due to the fact that at one point the Turks might demand for autonomous region with the support of the rest of the Muslim minorities. On the other hand, the birth rate of Turks had to be

²⁰⁵ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 10.

²⁰⁶ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 26.

motivated, since Turks were predominantly in the agricultural section and they were one of the main providers of the grain supply of Bulgaria.²⁰⁷ However, the fears that Turkey could demand a comprehensive migration agreement and the loss of skilled labour, meant for the communist party that the Turkish population had to be quickly as possible assimilated into the Bulgarian identity.²⁰⁸

Furthermore, another crucial factor for the assimilation policy was the Islamic influence. Turks who lived in the southern parts of Bulgaria had an access to Turkish language radio broadcasts, the party began to fear that it might lead to a Islamic propaganda on the radio channels of Turkey, and therefore to destabilise the southern parts of Bulgaria with a predominant Turkish population. As a result, it was of a paramount importance for the communist government to assimilate the Turks, by giving them the Bulgarian identity with Bulgarian names, with the hope to cut any further connections to Turkey.²⁰⁹ As a consequence from the above mentioned factors, the communist leader Todor Zhivkov's plan "Revival Process" of fast assimilation of Turks into Bulgarian identity came into being between 1984 and 1985. Since, the Islamic institutions and the Turkish language were banned, the only remained factor were the Turkish-Arabic names.²¹⁰ The Bulgarian government set up a plan to change all Turkish names in the time frame of one year. The initial intention of the party was to execute it smoothly by rewarding the volunteering Turks with premiums or social advantages.²¹¹ However, the Turks did not only resisted, but protested against this decision of the government, and as a result many of the protestors or these who did not cooperate with the assimilation were imprisoned, sentenced to concentration camps, specially to Belene, and even some of them were killed.²¹² The predominantly Turkish villages and cities were surrounded by army units who were charged with the task to check identification cards or passports of the Turks in the streets and buses, and in case of a Turkish named passport, it was stamped as invalid. Turkish language was

²⁰⁷ Ali Eminov, "There are no Turks in Bulgaria," in *The Turks of Bulgaria: the history, culture and political fate of minority*, ed. K.H. Karpat (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1990): 216.

²⁰⁸ Eminov, "There are no Turks in Bulgaria," 217.

²⁰⁹ Ayşenur Işık, "*The Bulgarian Assimilation Policy of the Turks between 1984-1989 and the Turkish minority resistance movement*" (Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2019), 15.

²¹⁰ Ömer Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878-1908)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1998), 300.

²¹¹ Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878-1908)*, 301.

²¹² Turan, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria (1878-1908)*, 302.

forbidden as well as a community language, with other words, in all spheres of life, private and public, one had to speak only Bulgarian.. In home inspections by the army units, any signs of Turkish identity, such as the holy book *Qur'an*, traditional furniture or clothing were destroyed.²¹³ Nevertheless, the assimilation policy radicalised further and consisted of unreasonable operations. For instance, the government changed the Turkish names of Turkish tombstones into Bulgarian ones in 1985 and collected skeletons of Turks in order to prove the Bulgarian roots of the former.²¹⁴

Nevertheless, the first resistance reaction occurred in Plovdiv and Varna where bombs exploded on the main train stations and airports. The Turkish minority was blamed and three Turks were arrested. The growing tensions between Turks and the party resulted in mass protests in several big cities like Plovdiv, Ruse and Kurdzhali in 1984, which was a clear sign to the government that unlikely to Pomaks, Turks were not willing to convert to the Bulgarian identity, and the assimilation process would be not smooth. Between 700 and 900 Turks were killed during mass protests and 1200 Turkish leaders were sentenced to heavy labor in the concentration camp Belene.²¹⁵ In order to stop the “Revival Process”, the Turkish prisoners took a radical step by starting a hunger strike. Turkey, on the other hand played the diplomatic card and advocated for the human rights of the Turks and appealed to international organisations to mediate between Turkey and Bulgaria for comprehensive migration agreement of Turks.²¹⁶ Turkey claimed that the name changing campaign was not only unacceptable, but also it breached the human rights policies. After several diplomatic talks, exchanged letters and international pressure resulted from protests of Turks in France, Turkey, Belgium and the USA, Bulgaria did not have any other choice but to open the borders with Turkey and to negotiate a migration agreement with the latter, however, the communist party was reluctant do to it fast. The Bulgarian government hoped that by leading the migration agreement, the Bulgarian Turks would lose hope and accept the assimilation policy. However, under the pressure of the British Foreign Minister Sir Geoffrey Howe and the exchanged diplomatic notes between USA, Turkey and Bulgaria, the latter had

²¹³ Işık, “*The Bulgarian Assimilation Policy of the Turks between 1984-1989*,” 17.

²¹⁴ Ayşegül İnginar, “*Bulgaristan`dan Türk göçü(1985-1989)*” (PhD diss., University of Marmara, 2010), 42.

²¹⁵ Eminov, “There are no Turks in Bulgaria,” 210.

²¹⁶ Işık, “*The Bulgarian Assimilation Policy of the Turks between 1984-1989*,” 22.

not other choice but to speed up the migration agreement and open the borders. Between 1985 and 1989- several waves of Turkish migration to Turkey took place. The estimated number of migrants was 350 000 Turks. Yet, the protests of the Muslim minorities, led by the Turks did not cease until 1989 where the demands for restoring the native names became paramount.²¹⁷

On the whole, the assimilation policy of the government did not succeed to convert the ethnic Turks into the Bulgarian identity, however, the party succeeded to convert the Turks into secularism. After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, most of the Turks restored their native names, however, they did not restore the connection to the religion.²¹⁸

3.4 The debate of conversion

Having mentioned above the several reasons for assimilation policies, especially for the “Revival Process”, the government had to justify its actions towards Muslim minorities, in particular Turks, since the party could not publish and humiliate its self with the demographic decline report of Bulgarians or simply showing vulnerability by acknowledging assimilation failure with Turks till 1984, the government had to come up with a convincing evidence, which will provoke an ongoing debate among academicians in modern Bulgaria concerning a very sensitive element, namely the conversion to Islam during the Ottoman rule.

The communist party gathered list of scholars and academicians from various fields to collect evidence in support of a new version of Bulgarian history and to define Turks and Pomaks in that history as “pure-blooded” Bulgarians , however, victims of Ottomans. Between 1970 and 1980, the scholars were participating in field research projects in the Rhodopes for Pomaks and northern and southern Bulgaria for Turks. The collected pseudo evidences and manufactured facts to prove that Turks and Pomaks were with Bulgarian identity, however forgotten due to the cruel and brutal rule of the Ottomans.²¹⁹ The socialist scholar Hristo Hristov who became the symbol of the socialist propaganda with his claim “forgotten Bulgarian roots of Turks”

²¹⁷ Işık, “*The Bulgarian Assimilation Policy of the Turks between 1984-1989*,” 29-32.

²¹⁸ Işık, “*The Bulgarian Assimilation Policy of the Turks between 1984-1989*,” 32-35.

²¹⁹ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 12.

published several studies and researches where he argued that the spread of Turkish language was due to the forced conversion to Islam. He argued that during the Ottoman empire, Anatolian Turkish and other Turkic languages were spread throughout the Ottoman Balkans, especially in the Ottoman military, administration and religious establishments. The representatives of the former married Bulgarian women, and the children and grandchildren of these families created and developed a Turkish dialect which later on was called Turkish in Bulgaria. He continued with his argumentation that these Ottoman members must have been from Janissaries or other members of the Ottoman army that consisted of forcibly converted to Islam children. Therefore, they married later Bulgarian women and converted them into Islam. Furthermore, he states that Islamized Bulgarian women, Bulgarian women in harems, and young Bulgarian men and women employed in the households of Ottomans, all of them favoured the spread of Islam and Turkish language.²²⁰

Indeed, most of the Turks who settled down in the Ottoman Bulgaria were men, and they were marrying Bulgarian women, who converted to Islam. However, as Eminov explains, and accuses Hristov in history ignorance that during the conquest of the Balkans from the Ottomans in 14th century, a considerable number of Turkish families, both peasants and pastoralists had been settled in the region. Eminov further emphasises that this fact was not ignored from the party, however, as it seems it was ignored from the academicians.²²¹

Furthermore, Hristov claims that the spread of Islam and the Turkish language in Bulgaria was due to the Ottoman policies towards its Orthodox Christian subjects. The Ottomans, who had a dominant role in the Millets system had the power to impose the Turkish language as the dominant language among the Ottoman subjects. Hristov adds to it, that Muslims and non-Muslims were obliged to speak Turkish and he claims, using stories and legends told by old Bulgarian people, that during the “Turkish times” various tortures and sanctions were imposed upon Bulgarians if they refused to speak Turkish, such as cutting off the tongues or simply killing them.²²²

²²⁰ Hristo Hristov, *Stranitsi ot Bulgarskata istoriia : ocherk za isliamiziranite bulgari i natsionalnovuzroditelniia protses* (Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1989), 100-101.

²²¹ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 13.

²²² Hristov, *Stranitsi ot Bulgarskata istoriia*, 101.

As I argue here, there is not any supported evidences provided by Hristov, and I completely support the argumentation of Eminov, that it was not a precondition of conversion to Islam to give up on native language and it was not an Ottoman policy to motivate this condition.²²³ On contrary, as Eminov highlights, many converts during Ottoman Balkans, could preserve their native language and even further develop them in their societies, such as Pomaks in Bulgaria, Bosnian Muslims and Albanian Muslims.²²⁴ As the scholar Maria Todorova explains, the reason of history ignorance from Hristov and the party propaganda with the manufactured evidences is that between 1960s and 1970s, the nationalist feelings among the socialist intelligentsia, specially historians and writers rose drastically, with the support of the communist party. They presented evidences, that were manipulated in order to maintain the thesis that Bulgaria had existed before the Ottoman conquest and it was a “nation” made up of Proto-Bulgarians, Slavs and Thracians, that succeeded to survive pure and untouched. However, the Turks and Pomaks created challenges to this thesis.²²⁵ Using the “forced conversion” claims from Hristov, which became the main propaganda machine of the party to implement the assimilation “Revival Process” the government decided to radicalise its conversion propaganda using, ironically enough, the Christianity. As the scholar Vera Mutafchieva argues, that the voluntary conversion of Bulgarian or Balkan individuals during the Ottoman rule was disregarded from the socialist academicians, and instead it was implemented the sense of violence and only violence from the Ottomans to Bulgarians to convert them into Islam.²²⁶

Having provided different works of scholars in chapter one and two, I do disagree with Hristov that the conversions were forced. Moreover, as we have seen from Eminov, Mutafchieva and Todorova, the thesis of forced conversion is based mainly on falsified evidences and manipulated historical facts. Using the tables of Minkov for the population in the Ottoman Balkans between 15 and 17 century from chapter two, one can see the dominant Christian population which contradicts the thesis of Hristov for

²²³ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 13.

²²⁴ Eminov, *Turkish and other Muslim minorities in Bulgaria*, 14.

²²⁵ Maria Todorova, “Language in the construction of ethnicity and nationalism: the Bulgarian case,” *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 28 (2006): 26-28.

²²⁶ Vera Mutafchieva, “The Turk, the Jew, and the Gypsy,” in *Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria*, ed. Antonina Zhelyazkova and Jørgen S. Nielsen (Sofia: IMIR, 1994), 34.

married Bulgarian women who converted to Islam and their children and grand children became Turks. In this occasion the dominant population would have been predominant Muslim, which is not the case. I disagree as well with the Turkish language thesis of Hristov, that because Bulgarians were forcibly converted to Islam, they had to give up on their native languages. As Eminov argues, the existence of Albanian Muslims, Bosnian Muslims and Pomaks, prove further that Hristov is wrong. As we have seen from chapter 2, during the reign of Sultan Mehmed the fourth, the conversion ceremonies to Islam that occurred were voluntarily. In addition, with the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions of Minkov and the narrative sources of Baer, I argue and prove that the conversions during the Ottoman empire were with socio- economic character. I cannot deny the fact that they were forced conversions, such as the Janissary unit, space conversion (Istanbul) or conversions of Jewish physicians in the palace, nevertheless, the wide accepted thesis of Hristov for forced conversions without any empirical evidences, such as Ottoman documents, tax- registers and others, or profound analyses supported with narrative stories, cannot be simply accepted. As a result, the ongoing debate between the old socialist school and the new democratic academic school continues to feed the nationalist propaganda in modern Bulgaria, however as it seems, the new generation of academicians might change this tendency through new unbiased researches.

Conclusion

Conversion to Islam in the Ottoman Balkans was a gradual process that started in the fifteenth century where the majority of the conversions were the child levy for the janissary unit. It continued to develop in the sixteenth century, however, the peak of the conversions to Islam was the seventeenth century where non-Muslims population in the rural parts was embracing Islam as their new religion. With the exception of devshirme, most of the conversions that occurred were voluntarily with socio-economic reasons.²²⁷ The different elements of conversions: conversion of self, conversion of others to the same religion, conversion of geography and space, all of them were found under the rule of Mehmed IV in the seventeenth century. During his rule, the empire was experiencing religious intensification with the Kadizadelis who claimed the Sufis as infidels and purified Islam from foreign elements and innovations, such as forbidding coffee and tobacco consumption, and the closure of coffeehouses. All this policies led to political turmoil, violence and bloodsheds in the streets between Muslims in Istanbul, refusing to convert to pious Kadizadeli Islam and the followers of the movement. Mehmed IV, during the political crises, desired to provide normality, social balance and order, he used conversions of Christians and Jews as an instrument to achieve it and to legitimise his authority.²²⁸ The conversion of Eminönü to Muslim space and the construction of the imperial mosque by Hatice Turhan strengthened the image of the dynasty and symbolised the conversion of the two into pious Islam. In addition, the court historian Abdi Pasha notes during his stay with Mehmed IV in Edirne in 1663²²⁹ that the sultan engaged actively with the Christian subjects of the empire during military campaigns or hunting trips in south-eastern or north-eastern part of the Ottoman Balkans where the Christians eventually converted to Islam and were bestowed with Muslim clothes as a symbol of religious transformation. As Minkarizade notes each non-Muslim who wears a white turban on his head, and says

²²⁷ Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans*, 193.

²²⁸ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 245.

²²⁹ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 106.

“I am a Muslim,” he respectfully is converted. Therefore the Muslim clothing and the money contributed after conversion played a crucial symbolic role.²³⁰ Specified in the *Kisve Bahasi* petitions from Minkov, we can without doubt assess that all non-Muslims who petitioned to be converted, received clothing or money. Some of them even requested from the sultan a position in the palace, such as the petitioner from the region Rustchuk who wanted to become part of the *sipahi* in exchange for his conversion. The narrative source of Covel provided by Baer, indicates that some of the conversions to Islam occurred in conversion ceremonies either in the palace or in the imperial tent in the presence of the sultan. Despite the mistake of Minkov who argues that the conversions were not in the presence of the sultan, both Minkov and Baer undoubtedly agree that the conversions were voluntarily.

The above mentioned examples serve as independent variables to my hypothesis that the conversions during the Ottoman empire were voluntarily, with socio-economic reasons, and with it I do oppose the thesis of the Bulgarian scholar Hristov who argues that conversions to Islam during the Ottoman empire were forced.²³¹ With this thesis he attempted to justify the actions of the Bulgarian communist party who implied severe assimilation policies towards its Muslim minorities. Although, the party in the beginning of its rule in 1945 had softer behaviour towards its Muslims citizens, however after the unsuccessful conversion of ethnic Turks and Pomaks to socialist identity, the party sought for radical assimilation policies where Turkish language and schools were prohibited, the Pomaks were instructed only in Bulgarian in schools.²³² ²³³ The name changing campaign for Pomaks was brutal and executed with iron fist in 1971 where many Pomaks were arrested or sent to concentration camps. However, the campaign was successful in terms of name-changing policy, nevertheless, it failed fully to convert them to Bulgarian identity.²³⁴ Unlike to Pomaks, Turks resisted the “Revival Process” with long and brutal protests, where many of them were imprisoned or sent to the concentration camps. All this political turmoil drew the international attention, specially the one of Turkey, who after several diplomatic talks with Bulgaria

²³⁰ Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 196-198.

²³¹ Hristov, *Stranitsi ot Bulgarskata istoriia*, 100-101.

²³² Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities,” 10.

²³³ Şimşir, *Bulgaristan Türkleri*, 183.

²³⁴ Eminov, “Social Construction of Identities,” 12.

and international pressure on the latter, the borders were opened and a migration wave took place after 1985. The attempts of the party to assimilate the Turks into Bulgarian identity failed, however, the communist government succeeded to secularise the Turks.²³⁵

The aim of this work was to scrutinize the conversion to Islam in the early modern Ottoman empire, where we have reached the conclusions that there was indeed forced conversion covered as “state-mandated” conversion policies where space, Jewish physicians and the janissary unit were subjected to forced conversion to Islam. However the juxtaposition with the conversion ceremonies of Mehmed IV, or the *millet* system and its poll-tax, show us that most of the conversions during fifteenth and seventeenth century were voluntarily. Moving to the twentieth century, it is interesting to see how the Bulgarian communist party implied the same rhetoric of conversions on the ethnic Turks and Pomaks, covered under “state-mandated” conversion to Bulgarian identity. Nevertheless, as one can conclude from this work, the latter failed to imply it, whereas the former bestowed clothes to the new members of Islam.

²³⁵ Işık, “*The Bulgarian Assimilation Policy of the Turks between 1984-1989*,” 32-35.

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APPENDICES

Kisve Bahasi Petitions: Facsimiles and Translations



Document 1. NPTA XX 1\28, f. 26, 36x21.5 cm, divani (1671)
Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670- 1730* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 211.

Your Majesty, my Prosperous and Merciful Sultan, may you be healthy!

Your humble slave is a Jew. From young age, I have been trained in the craft of metal purifying in the State mint. May praise be to God, and may He be extolled, I have now been illuminated by the true faith and I have reached the divine truth. After petitioning to be honored with Islam in the presence of Your Majesty, I would like to request from Your Merciful, Most High the following:

That I, your humble slave, be reckoned by my Good Illustrious Lord among his servants with an Exalted Order placing me in charge, for the duration of my lifetime, of the guild of metal purifiers at the State Mint. In return, I will be accountable to the state by depositing each year in the State Treasury the amount of 31,000 *akçes*. In order to spread the Muslim zeal among the accursed Jews, deign to allow your humble slave to attain his goal. In this respect, the rest is left to the favor and grace giving decree of Your Majesty, my Illustrious Sultan.

Your servant

[Endorsement of the Grand Vizier]: To be given a luxury set of clothes, accordingly! This is my command! 06.12.1707

[Extract from the accounts of the *ba muhasebe*]: Expenses for luxury set of clothes for a new Muslim honored with the Holy Islam and given clothes based on [his] petition and the Imperial decree:

Premium grade broadcloth Quantity	Cotton pants Quantity	Premium grade broadcloth Quantity
1	1	1
For embroidered robe:		For trousers:
4 [<i>zıraa</i>]		2 [<i>zıraa</i>]
Price of one <i>zıraa</i>		Price of one <i>zıraa</i>
3 [<i>guru</i>]		3 [<i>guru</i>]
<i>guru</i>	<i>guru</i>	<i>guru</i>
12	8	6

Translation to Document 1 (1)

Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kısve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 212.

Expenses for tailor 1.5 [Total] 13.5		Expenses for tailor 2 [Total] 10		Expenses for tailor 1 [Total] 7	
Vest Quantity 1 <i>guru</i> 3.5	Shirt 1 <i>guru</i> 5	Blue belt Quantity 1 <i>guru</i> 5	Underpants Pair 1 <i>guru</i> 4	Turban Quantity 1 <i>guru</i> 1	Slippers Pair 1 <i>guru</i> 1
Total <i>guru</i> paid: 50					

According to the Imperial decree, a luxury set of clothes was bought for one, new Muslim honored with the Holy Islam. To kindly order [the issue of] a Treasury bill, see the [above] records of the Central Accounting Department. In this regard, everything is left to the decree of His Majesty my Prosperous Sultan.

[Raport (*telhis*) of the *ba defterdar* to the Grand Vizier]:
The report of your servant is as follows:

Exactly 50 *guru* were spent for the purchase, dressing and taking of fine measures for a luxury set of clothes for one person according to the Imperial decree for this humble subject, a new Muslim honored with the Holy Islam. When this becomes known to Your Excellency, it is necessary that you kindly order the issue of a Treasury bill from the Central Accounting Department. [However], even if a decree of Your Excellency is issued in this regard, [the final decision] is left to the decree of His Majesty, my Prosperous Sultan.

[Oval signature of the *ba defterdar*]

[Final endorsement of the Grand Vizier]: Correct! To be issued a Treasury bill according to the report! This is my command! [Date]: December 21, 1707

[Final endorsement of the *ba defterdar*]: Correct!

[Note from the *ba muhasebe*]: Treasury bill was issued on December 22, 1707.

Translation to Document 1 (2)

Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kısve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 213.

Your Majesty, my Illustrious and Prosperous Sultan, may you be healthy!

Your humble slave is old and blind. Now I was honored with the Holy Islam but I am not able to earn my living and because of a debt, I no longer have any possessions. I am throwing myself at your feet and I am pleading with you, my Merciful Sultan, that you kindly order a pension of several *akçes* allotted from the customs of Edirne to be bestowed on your poor slave. The rest is left to the decree of your Majesty, my Illustrious Sultan.

Your servant, Süleyman, new Muslim

[Endorsement of the Grand Vizier]: Correct! To be registered by the appropriate department that because he is blind and was honored with the Holy Islam in the Imperial presence, he is given an income of two *akçes* a day. This is my command! [Date]: April 1, 1671

[Endorsement of the *ba defterdar*]: Correct! Accounted! Prepare a Treasury bill!

[Note from the *ba muhasebe*]: Registered. The Treasury bill was issued.

Translation to Document 2

Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kısve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 202.



Document 3. 1A\6808, 30.8x21 cm, divani and siyakat (1721)
Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kısve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 218.

Your Majesty, my Illustrious and Merciful Lord, my Sultan, may you be healthy!

Your humble servant is one of the educated people. I was honored with the Holy Islam in the Highest Presence of My Lord. I plead to my Most High Merciful Lord that, since [the giving of] my [new] clothes and my circumcision are still to come and I don't have a place [designated for the latter] you order that a place for performance of my circumcision be designated. I also plead to be appointed among the group of [your] enlightened servants. The rest is left to the decree of the Illustrious and Gracious my Sultan.

Your servant, the new Muslim, a [former] priest

[Endorsement of the Grand Vizier]: Correct! Give [him] accordingly the cash value of a luxury set of [new] clothes for one person! This is my command! September 22, 1721

[Endorsement of the *ba defterdar*]: Issue a Treasury bill!

[Second endorsement of the *ba defterdar*]: [Give] an estimate for one luxury set of clothes in the margin [of the document]!

[Excerpts from the accounts of the *ba muhasebe*]:

Cash value of luxury set of clothes [according] to purchase order from 07/05/1721 <i>guru</i> 64	Cash value of luxury set of clothes [according] to purchase order from 18/05/1720 <i>guru</i> 25	Cash value of luxury set of clothes [on] 10/11/1717 <i>guru</i> 16
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[Final endorsement of the *ba defterdar* on top of excerpt 2]: Issue a Treasury bill according [to this excerpt].

[Note of the *ba muhasebe*]: A Treasury bill was issued on 07/10/1721.

[Inscription on *verso*]: [Given] personally to Hasan *Çavu*

Translation to Document 3

Minkov, Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 219.

پادشاه ظل الله
 حضرت محمد مصطفی
 شوق منو مهابتو عنایتلو
 سید بنی قنوه انشا
 کتب بهر کمال
 عرصه حال قوللری هنوز باطل دن چغوب حق دین قبول ابدی
 اسلام ایله مشرف اولوب شاه زاده حضرت پد و س نواسک
 اولاد لری کبی بن غریب خندان اندرب و جیحانه او جاعندن بران
 پاره ایلد بو قوللری منور هر اخی خواص زمره شنه احوال بیورلوق
 بایبن عنایتلو مصلحتلو پادشاه حضرت بکر
 کم بوق مرده غریب ایاقلار صفت

۱۲۸۲
 ۱۲۸۲

Document 4. 1A\57265, 31x21.5 cm, divani (1720)
 Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kise Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 216.

Your Majesty, Noble, Magnificent Padishah, the shadow of God [on Earth], may God, Whose praises I recite and Who is to be extolled, guard and save your blessed Imperial body from errors and never put an end to the reign of your noble mercy over mankind. Amen.

The lucky petition of your humble slave [is the following]:

I have just left the false and accepted the true religion, and honored with Islam [in your presence]. [I plead that] you order, I, a poor-man's son, to be circumcised [together] with His Majesty the Royal prince and others of your pious children. In addition, [please] make me, your obedient slave, happy by admitting me among the group of Imperial servants and by [appointing me] to the corps of the arsenal, [thus] giving me a source of income. In this respect [everything] is in the hands of your Majesty, the All-powerful and Merciful, my Padishah.

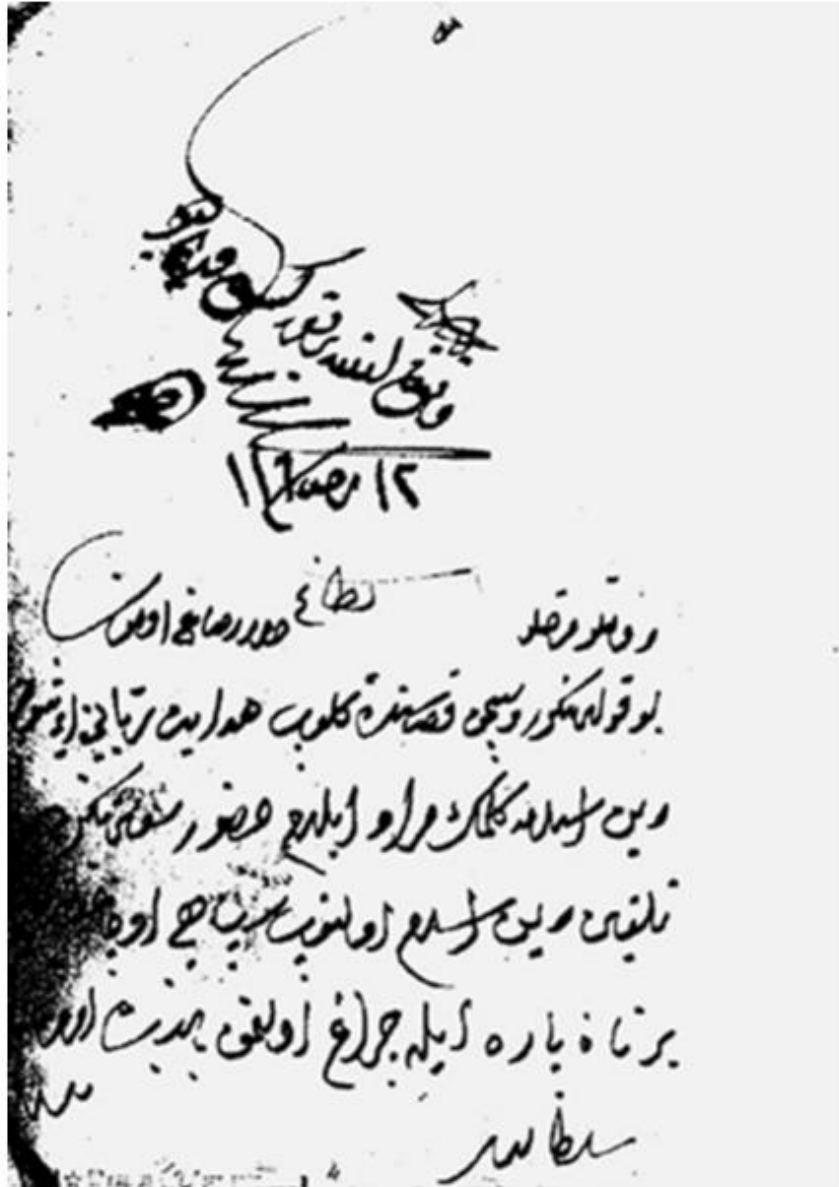
I don't have anybody, [they are all] dead and my poor legs are disabled.

Your servant Hristo

[Endorsement of the Grand Vizier]: Correct! Give [him] the cash value of [new] clothes for one person, according to the law! This is my command! [Date]: August 30, 1720

[Endorsement of the *ba defterdar*]: Issue a Treasury bill!

[Note of the *ba muhasebe*]: Treasury bill was issued on September 2, 1720



Document 5. CG 34\2, f. 4, 16.5x22 cm, divani (1704)
Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 209.

Your Majesty, my Illustrious and Generous Sultan, may you be healthy!

Your humble slave comes from the district of Rustchuk. I reached the divine truth and wished to come and clarify my religion. I was taught the articles of faith and [embraced] the religion of Islam in your presence. I plead that you appoint me novice in the *sipahi* corps to make my living. The rest is left to the decree of my Sultan.

Your servant

[Endorsement of the Grand Vizier]: Correct! Give [new] clothes to [this] one person according to the law! This is my command! November 10, 1704

[Endorsement of the *ba defterdar*]: Correct!

Translation to Document 5

Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 218.

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صاحب منیر افندی کمالی
پدر بیگ
۹۷

مردود و تو سلطان حضرت افندی
 بوقولین کولیکسره ده دوم اوجینا از جبر استیضاح صفت
 بعنایه الله تعالی سزای اسلام اید مشرق از جبر و غزایه کند
 بنیت اید و جبر حضرت سوره کلام و حقه کسره کنیز و غزایه نشند
 اویزه مرته حضرت سزایه کنیز کلام ایلایی دبی و غزایه
 و نایه لفظی

Document 6. OAK 76\52, f. 30, 21.4x15.2 cm, divani (1686)
 Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 205.

Your Majesty, my Prosperous and Generous Sultan, may you be healthy!

Your humble slave is a Greek boy from Gölükesre who worked as a craftsman in Istanbul. In your presence, by the grace of God, the exalted, I was honored with the Holy Islam and wished to go on a Holy war. I wish, in [return] for my desire to go on a Holy war and for the [cash value of new] clothes, that you help me get a low rank position in your noble service. The rest is left to the decree of my Sultan.

Your Servant

[Endorsement of the Grand Vizier]: Correct! Give [new] clothes for exactly one person according to the custom. This is my command!
[Date]: April 14, 1686

Translation to Document 6

Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 206.



Document 7. 1\11011, 22.4x14.4 cm, divani (1712?)
Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 214.

Your Majesty, my Illustrious and Prosperous Sultan, may you be healthy!

Your insignificant, humble servant is a Christian girl from among the inhabitants of Kadıköy, from the Greek people. I attained to the divine truth and wish to be honored with the Holy Islam [because] my parents want to marry me to an unbeliever. I want to be honored with the Holy Islam in Your Imperial presence. My request is the following:

I plead that, [since] I accepted the Islamic faith, I be kindly granted [the cash value] of my [new] clothes. The rest is left to the decree of my Illustrious Sultan.

[Endorsement of the Grand Vizier]: Correct! Give [her] the cash value of [new] clothes for one woman! This is my command! [Date]: October 25, 1712

[Endorsement of the *ba defterdar*]: Issue a Treasury bill.

[Note from the *ba muhasebe*]: Treasury bill was issued on October 23, 1712(?)

Translation to Document 7

Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahasi Petitions and Ottoman Social Life*, 215.

Pledge of Honesty

*On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work
in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorised
assistance on it.*

Kemran Rahmiev Daudov