

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**MASTER THESIS**

**FROM OTTOMAN SCRIPT TO LATIN ALPHABET:  
THE ROLE OF THE WESTERN-CENTERED  
INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM ON THE REALIZATION  
OF THE ALPHABET REFORM IN TÜRKİYE**

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**THESIS SUPERVISOR  
ASST. PROF. MEHMET AKİF KAYAPINAR**

**ISTANBUL, 2023**

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by

**ERGÜN AYGÖR**

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in  
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APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts Political Science and International Relations.

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This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

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## ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

OSMANLI HARFİNDEN LATİN ALFABESİNE: TÜRKİYE'DE HARF  
İNKİLÂBİNİN GERÇEKLEŞMESİNDE BATI MERKEZLİ ULUSLARARASI  
SİSTEMİN ROLÜ

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Bu tez, uygulandığı günden itibaren tartışma konusu olan alfabe reformuna dair çizilen geleneksel sınırlarını aşarak, reformun arkasındaki itici gücün, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun gerileme ve yıkılış dönemleri sırasında kök salan Batı merkezli uluslararası sisteme kadar izlenebileceğini öne sürüyor. Erving Goffman'ın leke teorisini ve Norbert Elias'ın yerleşikler dışarıdakiler ayrımlarını kullanarak çizdiği kavramsal çerçeve ile tez Batı merkezli uluslararası sistemin Türkiye'nin kimlik oluşumunu nasıl etkilediğini keşfetmektedir. Batı merkezli uluslararası sistemin hakim norm ve standartları yerleşik üyelerin sahip oldukları ortak unsurlardan meydana gelmektedir. Bu ortak unsurlar haricinde kalan öğeler leke olarak yaftalanmaktadır. 19. yüzyıldaki uluslararası sistem, Batılı ülkelerin yerleşik olarak ayrıcalıklı bir konuma sahip olduğu, Batılı - Avrupalı - Hıristiyan olmayan ülkelerin dışarıdakiler olarak kategorize edildiği hiyerarşik bir yapı sahipti. Sonuç olarak, Batı normlarına uymayan niteliklere sahip bu devletler lekelenme yaşadılar ve bu da kendi algıları üzerinde derin bir etkiye yol açtı. Batılı olmayan devlet toplulukları uluslararası ilişkilerde kabul ve meşruiyet ararken, modernleşme süreci bu duyguları yoğunlaştırdı. Çoğu ülke, algılanan lekelemenin üstesinden gelmek için iç ve dış politikalarını Batı idealleriyle uyumlu hale getirmeye çalıştı. Bu çaba, uluslararası toplumdaki konumlarını güvence altına almanın ve yerleşikler ile dışarıdakiler arasındaki uçurumu kapatmanın bir yolu olarak kapsamlı reformları ve modernite arayışını içeriyordu. Bu

tez harf inkılabını Türkiye'nin leke düzeltme çabası olarak görüp Batı merkezli uluslararası sistemde yer bulabilmek amacına matuf olarak gerçekleştiğini savunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, çok sayıda devlet, küresel normlar ve kurumlarla aktif olarak ilgilenerak, Batılı olmama lekesini düzeltmek ve yerleşikler arasında yer alabilmek adına çabaladı. Bu dinamik, uluslararası sistem içinde Batılı ve Batılı olmayan devletler arasındaki ilişkinin tarihsel önemini vurgulayarak, küresel bağlamda kimlik, kabul ve meşruiyet arayışının karmaşıklığını sergilemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Batı Merkezilik, Uluslararası Sistem, Harf İnkılabı, Modernleşme, Batılılaşma, Uluslararası İlişkiler.



## ABSTRACT

### FROM OTTOMAN SCRIPT TO LATIN ALPHABET: THE ROLE OF THE WESTERN-CENTERED INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM ON THE REALIZATION OF THE ALPHABET REFORM IN TÜRKİYE

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This thesis argues that the alphabet reform, which has been a subject of controversy since its implementation, can be understood beyond its boundaries by tracing its underlying driving force back to the Western-centric international system that took root during the decline and collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Using Erving Goffman's stigma theory and Norbert Elias' distinction between the Established and the Outsiders, the thesis explores how the Western-centered international system affects Türkiye's identity formation. The dominant norms and standards of the Western-centric international system were constructed based on the shared attributes of its established members. Any elements falling outside of these shared attributes were stigmatized. In the 19th century international system, a hierarchical structure prevailed, where Western countries occupied a privileged position as established, while non-Western, non-European, and non-Christian countries were categorized as outsiders. Consequently, these states that did not conform to Western norms experienced stigmatization, which profoundly impacted their perceptions. As non-Western state communities sought acceptance and legitimacy in international relations, the process of modernization intensified these sentiments. Most countries endeavored to align their domestic and foreign policies with Western ideals to overcome perceived stigmatization. This effort involved comprehensive reforms and a pursuit of modernity to secure their position in the international community and bridge the gap between

established and outsiders. This thesis argues that the alphabet reform was Türkiye's attempt to rectify its stigma and that it was carried out with the aim of finding a place in the Western-centered international system. As a result, numerous states actively engaged with global norms and institutions, striving to rectify their non-Western stigma and be recognized as established. This dynamic highlights the historical significance of the relationship between Western and non-Western states within the international system, illustrating the complexities of identity, acceptance, and legitimacy-seeking in a global context.

**Keywords:** Western Centricity, International System, Alphabet Reform, Modernization, Westernization, International Relations.



## DEDICATION

It is dedicated to my beloved parents and my cherished wife.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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I express my deepest gratitude to my parents, Mehmet and Hatice, for their unconditional love, unwavering belief in my capabilities, and the financial support they have provided throughout my academic pursuits. Their constant encouragement and sacrifices have been the driving force behind my accomplishments, and I owe them a debt of gratitude that words cannot fully express.

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Ergün AYGÖR

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## LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
TUIK	Turkish Statistical Institute
UN	United Nations
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Alphabet as a Need of Societies

Considering the trajectory of historical progress, it is necessary to acknowledge the significant role of alphabets in the development of humankind. Alphabets represent one of the most vital instruments employed by human beings to record, transmit, and enhance their languages, histories, and cultures. The advent of alphabets marks a momentous milestone in the transition from oral traditions to written cultures. Written culture enables individuals to preserve knowledge for extended periods, disseminate it to wider audiences, and facilitate easier transmission. Alphabets play a crucial role in the advancement of this written culture as they enable people to record and share information and thoughts in a more enduring manner. When considering the critical role of alphabets in safeguarding and transmitting the historical and cultural heritage of societies to future generations, the significance they bear for any given community becomes abundantly clear (Logan, 2004).

Within the dynamic structure of society, specific needs and the necessity to address these needs systematically have rendered the use of alphabets inevitable for communities. Although these needs differ in nature depending on the development processes from one society to another, the common denominator is that the use of a writing system that can meet the developing needs within this dynamic structure has become indispensable for every society (Logan, 2004). So, what are the compelling factors that prompt societies to adopt alphabet usage? When considering the circumstances that make alphabet usage inevitable for individuals, the following needs come to mind, listed as follows.

Communication is the process of conveying information, thoughts, and emotions among individuals. The tools utilized in communication ensure the accurate

comprehension of messages, enhance the quality of communication, and ensure the durability of messages. Consequently, the usage of alphabets becomes inevitable for facilitating precise and effective communication. In the past, knowledge was solely transmitted orally, resulting in the inevitable loss or distortion of significant amounts of information. However, thanks to the advent of alphabets, information can now be directly recorded and transmitted to future generations. This contributes to the preservation of knowledge, enabling a better understanding of developments throughout human history. In societies lacking alphabet usage, oral communication prevails, and the transfer of knowledge remains limited. The use of alphabets facilitates written communication, allowing for faster and more accurate transmission of information. Considering both the need for systematic and advanced communication in interpersonal and international relations, alphabet usage becomes a necessity at both macro and micro levels (Fischer, 2003; 5 -15).

Trade and economy are among the most fundamental activities that have existed throughout history. To sustain these activities, the usage of alphabets has become inevitable. The utilization of alphabets facilitates the documentation, management, and dissemination of trade-related information, enabling improved organization, accountability, and comprehension within the realm of trade and economic activities. Alphabets also provide the necessary tools for recording and monitoring trade and economic transactions, enabling more efficient execution of economic activities. These activities are often managed through written documents, including orders, invoices, waybills, tax declarations, and contracts, among others. The accurate and effective preparation and management of these documents ensure the efficient conduct of commercial activities, underscoring the strong need for alphabet usage. Additionally, alphabet usage plays a crucial and critical role in the promotion and marketing of products within trade and economy. Advertising and promotional materials are prepared in written form to communicate the features and benefits of products to customers. The accurate and effective preparation of such materials is essential for capturing customer interest and increasing sales. Considering the shared history between trade, economy, and human history, and the presence of trade at both the intra-state and international levels, it becomes evident that trade and economy have sufficient significance to contribute to the widespread adoption of alphabet usage.

Legal and administrative needs can be identified as another category that significantly contributes to the inevitability of alphabet usage. Individuals form the fundamental building blocks of society, and their coexistence lays the foundation for the establishment of social relationships and governance systems. These social relationships bring about legal and administrative structures, paving the way for the adoption of a writing system. The usage of alphabets is crucial for the establishment and implementation of legal systems. A written system allows for easier sharing of information, more organized administrative procedures, and the recording of legal transactions. Individuals are obliged to utilize alphabets in order to document and communicate their legal and administrative affairs, as well as to read and comprehend laws. Primarily, legal systems rely heavily on written expression rather than oral or symbolic forms. The legal systems of many countries effectively serve their purpose through a specific alphabet and writing system. These writing systems primarily aim to write legal documents, record laws, document court decisions, and organize other official records. The recording and preservation of these documents in a developing world are indispensable for the enforcement of laws and judicial processes, and they are not feasible that much without the usage of alphabets. Furthermore, administrative needs also necessitate alphabet usage. States employ alphabets to identify and register the identities of citizens, prepare official documents, publish regulations, and fulfill other administrative duties. The fulfillment of these tasks is based on the writing system, and it has not been possible to carry out without using the alphabet as societies have developed in the process (Ullman, 1927: 315 – 320).

Religion has perhaps been the most significant factor triggering the use of alphabets throughout the history of humanity. Religion has prompted societies to have a need for writing in order to record belief systems, rituals, worship practices, and other religious activities. Consequently, religious leaders have been able to transmit sacred texts to future generations by writing and preserving these texts. During the early Islamic period, the necessity for a writing system in fulfilling religious needs became evident. A pivotal event in this regard was the compilation of the Qur'an, the sacred scripture of Islam, into a written volume during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. Despite the profound oral memorization skills possessed by hafizes, the decision to commit the verses to writing emerged as an essential measure to ensure the preservation and transmission of the sacred text to successive generations in a more accessible and reliable manner.

As a result, the introduction of a formal writing system has been a critical position in safeguarding the possible sanctity and perpetuity of Qur'anic verses and underlined the growing importance of written records in fulfilling religious requirements within the Islamic tradition (Kızıl, 2019). Furthermore, when religious leaders assumed roles in state governance, the necessity of maintaining written records contributed to the proliferation of alphabet usage. Religion has also encouraged the use of alphabets to facilitate communication among people speaking different languages. For instance, with the emergence of the Islamic faith, the Arabic alphabet became widely adopted. This facilitated communication among individuals speaking different languages in the Arab world. The influence of religion on alphabet usage extends beyond its immediate religious practices. It has had far-reaching implications in terms of preserving cultural heritage, disseminating knowledge, and fostering social cohesion. The advent of writing systems associated with religious practices has provided a framework for documenting and transmitting cultural and historical information across generations. Moreover, the widespread use of alphabets has fostered the development of written literature, allowing for the exploration and exchange of ideas, as well as the preservation of cultural narratives. In conclusion, religion has been a driving force behind the adoption and proliferation of alphabet usage throughout human history. Its impact extends beyond the realm of religious practices, encompassing legal systems, governance, intercultural communication, and the preservation of cultural heritage (Johnston, 2004).

The preceding examples and explanations attempted to elucidate the primary needs that necessitate the use of specific alphabets by societies. It should be noted that the concepts outlined above are not limited to those explicitly mentioned, as they serve the purpose of explanation and are thus presented as illustrative examples. When observed closely, it becomes apparent that these concepts are interconnected to varying degrees. There are no rigid boundaries between them, and aspects relevant to one concept can also be found within the scope of another. This is because within the dynamic structure of a society, social, cultural, economic, and religious developments occur cumulatively. For instance, the initial interactions between Arabs and Turks took place in the realms of warfare and trade (Bedirhan, 2019). These interactions necessitated communication between the two parties, strengthening the bond of negotiation and relations between the parties. As these relations grew in scope, the

cultural dimension between societies also came into play. Ultimately, with the Turks' adoption of Islam, the religious factor played decisive and important roles in the acceptance of the Arabic alphabet (Canpolat, 1991: 39 – 45).

It is evident that the interplay of various factors shapes the dynamics of societies, influencing their linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics. The complex nature of these interactions underscores the interdependence between the diverse aspects of human development. Moreover, it highlights the dynamic nature of societal evolution, where the cumulative effects of these factors contribute to the formation and transformation of alphabets, languages, and cultural practices. Understanding why and how alphabets have been used is essential for understanding their historical, social, and cultural significance. By recognizing how these factors are interconnected, we can gain a deeper understanding of how writing systems have evolved and influenced human communication and society over time (Alkim, 1991).

## **1.2. An Overview of the Alphabets Used by Turkish States Throughout History**

During various periods when the Turkic people resided in dispersed and semi-nomadic communities in Central Asia, different tribes utilized distinct alphabets at different times. Alphabets such as the Gokturk alphabet, Uyghur alphabet, and Orkhon alphabet emerged as unique writing systems employed by these Turkic communities throughout historical epochs. Given the absence of a unified global structure, it is conceivable that diverse Turkish groups within the decentralized and semi-nomadic society concurrently utilized distinct alphabets to transcribe their language. These alphabets played a crucial role in facilitating the written expression of the Turkish language (Tekin, 1991: 30 – 37).

The Gokturks, who emerged as the first Turkic community in Central Asia to generate written sources during the 6th century, devised their own alphabet to represent the Turkish language in written form. The Gokturk alphabet stands as the initial script utilized for Turkish languages. Developed by the Turks during the Gokturk Khaganate period, this alphabet provided them with a writing system that catered to the needs of Turkish languages. Comprising 38 characters, the Gokturk alphabet served as a versatile writing system adaptable to different Turkic languages (Tekin, 1991).

Similarly, the Uyghurs also made notable contributions to the advancement of written culture in Central Asia. As a Turkic community that thrived in Central Asia during the 8th century, the Uyghurs developed the Uyghur alphabet as a script specifically tailored for the Turkish language. Through this alphabet, the Uyghurs left behind a wealth of significant literary works. However, the scattered and semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Turkic people posed challenges to the widespread and standardized adoption or acceptance of a particular alphabet. In this point, it is needed to acknowledge that during that era, the prevailing circumstances did not necessitate a widespread literacy culture (Şçerbak, 2000: 190).

Furthermore, with the adoption of Islam by the Turkic communities, the Arabic alphabet gained prominence in Central Asia. The Arabic alphabet gradually became the preferred script for transcribing the Turkish language, supplanting the previously prevalent alphabets. This shift marked the emergence of the Arabic alphabet as perhaps the first shared script widely employed for the written expression of Turkish.

The historical trajectory of alphabets among the Turkic people in Central Asia reflects the complex interplay between sociocultural, linguistic, and religious factors. It underscores the dynamic nature of Turkic societies, where social, cultural, economic, and religious developments unfold cumulatively. For instance, the initial interactions between Arabs and Turks occurred primarily in the domains of warfare and trade, necessitating communication between the two parties. As these interactions deepened, cultural dimensions began to intertwine between the societies. Finally, with the Turks embracing Islam, religion played decisive and crucial roles in the acceptance of the Arabic alphabet within the Central Asian context (Tezcan, 1991; 39 – 45).

When examining the chronological sequence of the states established by the Turkic people following their adoption of Islam, it becomes apparent that the Arabic script served as the official alphabet for these states. Among these states, the Karakhanids, a Turkic Islamic state that thrived in Central Asia from the 8th to the 12th centuries, embraced the Arabic alphabet after embracing Islam. During the Karakhanid era, the Arabic script found extensive use in the composition of administrative documents, as well as the writing of religious texts and other literary works. Similarly, the Ghaznavid Empire, which reigned from the 10th to the 12th centuries, adhered to Islam and

adopted the Arabic alphabet as country's official writing system or script. During this period, the Ghaznavids produced a wide range of literary works, including poetry, historical sources, and religious texts, all composed in the Arabic script. The same trend is observed among the Anatolian Turks. Notably, the Great Seljuk Empire and the Sultanate of Rum, both governed by Seljuk dynasties, utilized the Arabic alphabet for writing Turkish from the 11th to the 13th centuries. Throughout the Seljuk period, the Arabic script was widely employed for the transcription of religious texts, official documents, historical records, and literary works. It is worth noting that the adaptation of the Arabic alphabet facilitated cultural exchange and enhanced the literary production among these Turkic states, enabling them to communicate and disseminate knowledge within the broader Islamic world (Henze, 1956).

The Ottoman Empire, originating as a frontier principality during the Seljuk period, gradually transformed into a vast empire that expanded its boundaries across three continents. As the last custodian among the major Turkish states of the Arabic alphabet for written Turkish, the Ottomans played a pivotal role in shaping the script system that emerged with the acceptance of Islam by the Turks in the 9th century, and persisted for nearly a millennium thereafter (Karadoğan, 2017: 6). Aligning with the precedent set by earlier Muslim Turkic states, the Ottomans wholeheartedly embraced the Arabic alphabet as the standard writing system for Turkish, a practice upheld from their inception until their eventual decline.

In addition to its remarkable political trajectory, transitioning from a principality to an empire, the Ottoman state also fostered notable advancements in the fields of knowledge, science and culture. This parallel development encompassed the proliferation of scholarship, literary works, and cultural achievements. Alongside the state's official utilization of the Arabic alphabet, both the general population and intellectuals actively employed this script to produce a wide range of literary and scholarly compositions.

The adoption of the Arabic alphabet by the Ottomans not only served as a means of written communication but also carried significant cultural and religious connotations. It became a symbol of the empire's Islamic identity and its affiliation with the broader Muslim world. The Arabic alphabet facilitated the dissemination of religious texts,

administrative documents, literary masterpieces, and intellectual discourse throughout the Ottoman domains. It provided a cohesive and standardized medium for expressing the richness of the Turkish language within the Islamic cultural framework.

The Ottoman Empire's extensive use of the Arabic alphabet underscored its commitment to Islamic traditions and its aspiration to establish a sophisticated literary and scholarly tradition. This adoption extended beyond official state functions, permeating various aspects of everyday life, education, and artistic expression. It contributed to the preservation and propagation of Turkish cultural heritage and demonstrated dramatic and effective stance in shaping the linguistic and intellectual legacy of the empire.

Overall, the Ottoman Empire's embrace of the Arabic alphabet as the script for written Turkish represents a significant and large chapter in history for Turkish people in terms of language and culture, showcasing the intricate interplay between political, religious, and intellectual dimensions within a vast and diverse empire (Sezgin, 2016).

The Arabic alphabet has largely become the shared script of Islam, perhaps due to the fact that all original Islamic texts were written in this alphabet, and no other script can fully encompass its nuances. As evidenced by the aforementioned chronological examples, subsequent to their adoption of Islam, the Turks, just like non-Arab communities including Iranians, Afghans, and others, commenced incorporating this script into their daily affairs, employing the same script in which the Qur'an was originally transcribed. The alphabet was adopted by the Turks, and over time, certain modifications were made to accommodate the linguistic and phonetic characteristics of the Turkish language. From that point onward, the Turks utilized this alphabet for approximately a thousand years. They not only regarded it as a writing system but also as an art form known as the art of hatt or calligraphy, intertwining their culture with this alphabet (Yıldız, 2012). The acceptance of the Arabic alphabet by the Turks exemplifies their integration into the broader Islamic cultural sphere and their commitment to the religious and intellectual legacy of Islam. It highlights the enduring influence and impact of the Arabic language and script on the Turkish language and provides a tangible link to the linguistic and cultural heritage shared with other Muslim

communities. The adaptation of the alphabet to suit Turkish phonetics reflects the dynamic nature of language and the capacity for cultural exchange.

### **1.3. Alphabet Reform**

Reform, which means changing the alphabet that the Turks have used for almost a thousand years, which took place on November 1, 1928, holds significant importance in the nation's history and merits in-depth examination. This momentous event marked the official adoption of the Latin alphabet, referred to as "Turkish Letters," as the standard reading-writing system for the Turkish language, replacing the previously used Arabic-based Ottoman script. The reform was a purposeful and strategic response to the prevailing Western-centric international norms, aligning Türkiye with other Western nations of that era. However, as will be explained in the thesis, Kemalist arguments tried to legitimize the reform by claiming the inadequacy of the Arabic alphabet (Ekinci, 2008, 61-64).

The rationale behind the adoption of the Latin alphabet, according to Kemalist perspective, was grounded in the belief that the Arabic script posed significant obstacles to progress and development. Advocates argued that the Arabic alphabet made it challenging to read and write Turkish accurately, while the Latin alphabet was more suitable when it comes to the representing the sounds of the Turkish language. For this reason, according to the Kemalist argument, the Arabic alphabet is seen as an obstacle to the increase in the Turkish literacy rate within the Turkish population. Furthermore, the emergence of advancing technologies introduced an additional supporting rationale favoring the preference for the Latin alphabet, as it offered cost efficiencies in terms of printing expenses. Additionally, the assertion that the Arabic script complicated the learning of Turkish language and hindered foreigners, including minority groups, from comprehending and engaging with Turkish society was another facet employed by Kemalist ideology to justify the revolution (Nedim & Asaf, 1933, 34 - 35).

However, it is important to acknowledge that this perspective has not been without its critics. Many have raised pertinent questions regarding the Kemalist argument, emphasizing that the utilization of the Arabic script was not exclusive to Türkiye and

had been widely employed in diverse contexts throughout the Islamic world. They contend that numerous nations that employ the Arabic alphabet have achieved noteworthy advancements in scientific disciplines, thus challenging the notion that the script itself inherently hampers progress. Detractors argue that the Kemalist endeavor was motivated not solely by aspirations for modernization but also by a deep-seated aspiration to sever historical connections with Türkiye's Ottoman past and forge a novel, secular Turkish identity. These critical viewpoints shed crucial light on the intricate and multifaceted nature of the alphabet reform, thereby underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of its underlying motivations and far-reaching implications (Elçarpar, 2018, 24 – 31).

The alphabet reform in Türkiye, encompassing the dramatical transition from the Arabic script to the Latin alphabet, has been a subject of extensive debate since its implementation. Both the proponents and critics of this reform have presented influential viewpoints; however, these perspectives often lack a robust empirical basis. The Kemalist position, which aimed to legitimize the alphabet reform, relied predominantly on rhetorical discourse that supports the new identity of the nation-building process rather than substantiated empirical evidence to establish a correlation between the Arabic script and Turkish literacy rates. On the other hand, detractors of the reform frequently emphasized its underlying objective of westernization and the conscious detachment from Türkiye's Ottoman heritage, directing their attention towards the perceived outcomes rather than delving into the root causes that prompted this transformative revolution. Consequently, the examination of the alphabet reform warrants a comprehensive analysis that takes into account various dimensions, such as empirical data, historical context, international system and the socio-political motivations that shaped this pivotal event in Türkiye's modernization trajectory.

#### **1.4. Literature**

The implementation of the alphabet reform has sparked considerable attention from the general public, a level of interest that has endured over time and remains a prominent fixture on the public agenda. Particularly on the anniversaries of this reform, diverse discussion programs actively seek out participants from various ideological backgrounds to partake in lively debates. Remarkably, these debates often reflect the

deeply entrenched ideological divisions that revolve around the subject of the alphabet reform, extending even to the involvement of academics in these engaging programs.

In contrast to its evident significance in public discourse, it is intriguing to note that the alphabet reform has not occupied a substantial portion of the literature within the domains of political science and international relations. Instead, the bulk of research on the alphabet reform has found its home within the expertise of historians and linguists, who have diligently explored this topic within the confines of their own academic disciplines.

For example, Sarısan showed in his study the reflections of the Alphabet Revolution in the Afyon province of Türkiye. It was emphasized that efforts were initiated to make the public literate with the Latin alphabet, with the institutes established before the alphabet reform. The effect of the alphabet reform on the literacy rate was tried to be shown by showing the distribution of the participation rates in the courses over the years. For example, the number of trainees, which was over eleven thousand in the first year, remained around two thousand five hundred people after 5 years of the reform. However, the author stated that despite this decrease, the alphabet reform made a positive contribution to the literacy rate (Sarısan, 2016). A similar study was conducted by Fatih Özen. This study examined the reflections of the reform on Edirne and the result is almost the same as the Afyon example. While the rate of public participation in reform-oriented studies through institutes such as Millet Mektepleri was high in the first period of the reform, this rate decreased after a short time (Özen, 2021). A similar study regarding the Konya example also shows the same result. Accordingly, although the literacy rate in Konya increased due to the high participation in the first years with the influence of the Millet Mektepleri, this rate gradually decreased and lost its effect after the five years following the reform (Kaya, 2016).

There are also studies emphasizing the role of the alphabet reform in the early republican reforms. Kıröğlü's research emphasizes that the alphabet reform facilitated the change in the field of culture and paved the way for other reforms in this field (Kıröğlü, 2008). Cemal Avcı's work, on the other hand, examines the alphabet reform in the context of the reasons put forward by the official ideology and emphasizes the place of *Millet Mektepleri* in the implementation of this reform (Avcı, 2013). The

study, written by Şentürk, emphasizes the importance of the press in shaping the national identity that was attempted to be established in the early period, and underscores its significance in the implementation of the alphabet reform as part of the modernization and civilization ideals embraced by the regime. Şentürk also asserts that this reform complements and facilitates other reforms (Şentürk, 2012, 27-38). Another study arguing that alphabet reform is an important element in Türkiye's modernization goal was written by Bakan. Bakan's study differs from other studies in that it emphasizes the undemocratic nature of the alphabet reform. In addition, the study emphasizes the destructive effect on the existing order as a result of the reform. It is very rare in the literature to express the harsh socio-cultural effects of the reform on society. It is stated in the study that many literate people lost this quality as a result of the reform (Bakan, 2013).

The transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Türkiye brought about significant changes in various fields. Historically, it is a common phenomenon that each new regime seeks to distinguish itself from the old regime, and one of the means to achieve this is through reforms. Reforms are often used as a tool to establish legitimacy for the new regime. Therefore, studies examining the alphabet reform, one of the early period reforms, shed light on Turkish history from a political perspective.

When we look at the late period of the Ottoman Empire and the founding process of the Republic, on one side, we find modern bureaucrats who make up the founding cadre of the Republic, while on the other side, we have the monarchy representing traditional values. The modern bureaucrats aimed to shape the identity of the new regime in line with Western norms, standards, and values. Furthermore, their efforts to integrate into the international system also helped the new elite establish and consolidate their power within Türkiye. Hence, studies that evaluate reform movements in terms of the legitimacy struggle between two regimes facilitate an understanding of the significance of the alphabet reform.

With the establishment of the Republic, actors in the center and periphery within the country were redefined. The reformist and modernization-oriented Kemalist cadre, represented by young bureaucrats, created a strong discourse and a set of ethical principles, extending beyond the alphabet reform, to establish a new framework of

legitimacy in contrast to the traditional values represented by the monarchy. These developments aided the Republic's elite in establishing and consolidating their power within Türkiye. In this context, Şerif Mardin's and Metin Heper's works are important in understanding the role of the alphabet reform in strengthening the legitimacy of the new regime (Mardin, 1990), (Heper, 2000, 63-82).

The convergence of international relations and the alphabet reform has not been extensively explored at an academic level to scrutinize its underlying rationale. In the realm of political science, scholars often offer general judgments or descriptive statements regarding the alphabet reform, treating it as a tangential topic while elucidating their primary research subjects in a broader context. As a result, the specific examination of the reasons behind the alphabet reform in the context of international relations has remained relatively scarce in scholarly discourse.

For instance, in his work "A Catastrophic Success," Lewis skillfully examined language reform during the Republican period, elucidating the language policies within a cause-and-effect framework. While his study includes general observations regarding the alphabet reform, positing it as a means of achieving Westernization, it lacks specific elucidation on the underlying motivations and persuasive factors that led Türkiye to undertake the alphabet reform as a step towards Westernization. Thus, the work falls short of providing comprehensive insights into the precise motives and methods employed to persuade Türkiye to undertake this significant linguistic transformation in its pursuit of Westernization (Lewis, 1999: 44).

A similar case can be observed in the work of İlker Aytürk, where he delves into the subject of language nationalism, with a primary focus on nationalism and language rather than specifically on the alphabet reform. Despite this, he briefly refers to the alphabet reform in one paragraph, providing a descriptive account of its purpose as being geared towards Westernization. However, Aytürk promptly redirects his attention back to his main subject, leaving the examination of the alphabet reform relatively limited in detail within the broader context of his work (Aytürk, 2006: 94).

In disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, and similar fields, the alphabet reform becomes a subject of academic research within the scope of these disciplines.

However, in the domains of history studies on this subject generally revolve around the literacy rate and are often confined within the framework set by the official ideology (Cemal, 2013: 46-54), (Saltık, 2016).

Therefore, this thesis desires to address previously mentioned gap in the literature and contribute by focusing on the underlying reasons behind the alphabet reform. It directs its attention to the transformation of the international system into a Western-centric structure and its implications on Türkiye.

By examining how the shift in the international system influenced Türkiye's decision to reform its alphabet, this thesis seeks to shed light on the factors that shaped Türkiye's national identity and its pursuit of Westernization.

### **1.5. Methodology**

This research desires to explore the reasons behind the change of alphabet in Türkiye, moving from the Arabic script to the Latin one in the year of 1928 during the early republican period. The central objective of this study is to challenge the notion that the transformation was primarily driven by the belief that the Arabic alphabet was an obstacle to development. Instead, it argues that the shift can be better understood within the context of Türkiye's quest for recognition and acceptance in the Western-centered international system during the early 20th century.

In order to achieve this objective, an asymmetric mixed method approach that combines quantitative data sources, albeit few, will be used in terms of addressing literacy statistics, despite keeping the qualitative method in weight. The research will draw on a diverse range of primary and secondary sources to provide a comprehensive analysis of the historical, social, and political factors surrounding the alphabet change.

Official books and publications from the Kemalist regime related to the Arabic alphabet will be critically examined to understand the perspectives and justifications presented by the proponents of the alphabet reform. The analysis of these materials will provide insights into the discourse of reformers and the underlying motivations behind the alphabet change. To gain a deeper understanding of the reformers' personal

motivations and perspectives, memoirs and autobiographies of key individuals involved in the alphabet change will be consulted. Statistical data on literacy rates and educational developments before and after the alphabet change will be gathered from official records and scholarly publications. These statistics will be used to assess the impact of the reform on literacy and educational accessibility in Türkiye, providing a balanced view of its consequences. Comparative studies with other nations' process on modernization will be conducted to explore common patterns and differences in their motivations and experiences. This will help establish whether the transformation was a response to broader global shifts towards Westernization or if it was solely influenced by internal factors. The research will analyze the broader historical context of Türkiye during the early 20th century, including geopolitical dynamics, international relations, and the emergence of nation-state ideologies. This analysis will contribute to understanding the broader context within which the alphabet change occurred. By employing critical discourse analysis, the study will critically examine the rhetoric used in official documents and reformers' discourses, aiming to uncover underlying power structures, cultural perceptions, and motivations that may have influenced the reform process (McDermott, 2002).

The findings of this research will be organized thematically and analyzed through an interpretive lens, drawing connections between various data sources to establish a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Türkiye's alphabet change. The proposed methodology seeks to shed light on the historical, sociopolitical and international dynamics that led to this transformative event and challenge the prevailing narrative surrounding the reform's motivations.

## **1.6. Research Question and Objectives**

As it has been attempted to explicate in the preceding paragraph, there is a dearth of persuasive research concerning the rationale behind the alphabet reform in Türkiye. The Kemalist argument has faced criticism due to its lack of empirical evidence and reliance on rhetorical discourse aimed at supporting the nation-building process and the cultivation of a new identity for the new regime. On the opposite side, opponents of the reform have been criticized for directing their focus towards the outcomes of the reform rather than delving into its fundamental causes. Consequently, the research

question of "Why did Türkiye change its alphabet?" encompasses an array of unresolved puzzles awaiting comprehensive exploration and analysis.

The establishment process of today's modern nation-states, particularly in the wake of significant historical developments, has been intricately shaped by processes of westernization and modernization. This prevailing trend is discernible on a global scale, as non-Western states grapple with their positioning within an international system heavily influenced by Western norms, standards, and institutions. While numerous countries have undergone comparable stages of transformation, Türkiye's decision to change its alphabet sets it apart from many other nations. Contrary to the assertions made by Kemalist proponents, countries such as Russia, Israel, China, Japan, and Korea, despite not adopting the Latin alphabet, have exhibited a level of technological advancement akin to that of Western nations. Furthermore, even within European societies, which have been at the forefront of Western influence, the adoption and acceptance of the Latin alphabet as a new script has not been universally embraced, as illustrated by Greece's steadfast adherence to its traditional alphabet. These examples underscore the intricate interplay of various factors and exemplify the diverse paths nations traverse in their pursuit of progress and national identity. The decision to change or retain an alphabet is influenced by a multitude of historical, cultural, and especially international considerations, further underscoring the complex nature of language reforms in nation-building processes (Ringmar, 2019).

In light of the aforementioned explanations, the research question's intriguing nature can be expounded upon as follows. The international system, established towards the conclusion of the 19th century and the commencement of the 20th century, assumed a Western-centric structure as a result of protracted struggles spanning previous centuries, culminating in Western triumph. With only a few isolated exceptions, non-Western countries existing outside this Western-centered global order/system have become subjects of processes aimed at westernization and modernization. If every non-Western country had uniformly adopted the Latin alphabet during this transformative era, the subject at hand would not have posed a puzzle and would have lacked substantive academic research value. Therefore, the diverse choices made by different nations regarding their alphabets reflect the intricate dynamics of national identity construction, language politics, and the negotiation of global power structures.

Scrutinizing these choices within the broader context of the international system elucidates the complex interplay between cultural, historical, and sociopolitical factors in shaping the trajectories of nations.

Although the thing that composes the puzzle of the research question and makes it interesting is the existence of the independent variable that pushes Türkiye to act differently from other countries in the process of modernization and Westernization, as explained above, both the public and the academic focus in Türkiye have been far from trying to find an answer to this issue. Consequently, a significant gap persists in the academic literature, particularly in terms of approaching the subject from the vantage point of international relations. It is within this context that the present thesis aims to address the aforementioned research gap by examining the primary driver behind Türkiye's decision to change its alphabet, attributing it to the establishment of the Western-centered international system and the Republic of Türkiye's response to this prevailing structure.

Therefore, should the thesis successfully achieve its objective, it will transcend the realm of descriptive explanations found in existing literature on Turkish politics and political history, and instead shed light on the influence of international relations developments on the trajectory of the alphabet revolution. By delving into the intricate interplay between domestic and global dynamics, this study aims to unveil the nuanced connections and implications between the revolution's historical context and the broader realm of international relations. In doing so, it aspires to contribute a novel perspective to the existing body of knowledge, providing a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors that shaped the alphabet reform in Türkiye.

### **1.7. Conceptual Framework: Stigma Metaphor and Its Application on the Alphabet Reform**

International relations theories encompass a discipline that seeks to understand the rationale behind the decisions made by various actors, including states, in their interactions with one another within the dynamic structure and framework of the global system. These theories aim to provide analytical responses by examining and interpreting international events and policies, as well as offering insights into the

complex nature of international relations and facilitating the prediction of future actions by actors.

Indeed, both in inter-state relations and within the broader international system comprising numerous actors, states possess the agency to adopt distinct decisions and courses of action. Occasionally, states may engage in amicable relations, while at other times, hostility may prevail. Despite the existence of commonalities among states in response to the same international system and its developments, it is not a foregone conclusion that every actor will uniformly make identical decisions and choices without exception. The multifaceted nature of international relations necessitates an exploration of the diverse factors influencing states' decision-making processes and the subsequent implications for their behavior within the global arena.

Following the preceding introduction, it is apparent that theories of international relations present diverse approaches aimed at elucidating the fundamental dynamics of international politics, the interactive processes among actors, and the consequential outcomes of these processes and interactions. Upon closer examination of these theories, it becomes evident that each theory places the primary determinant that triggers the decision-making of actors, including states, at the core of its framework. It would be correct to say that classical international relations theories such as realism and constructivism and others are state and power-centered. Although the useful nature of these theories in explaining events is accepted, in this thesis the theoretical frameworks explained below will be used to reveal the reason behind the alphabet reform.

From the declining period of the illustrious Ottoman Empire to the arduous processes of nation-building undertaken by the Republic of Türkiye, both historical periods were marked by a distinctive inclination towards the West, influencing their respective decision-making processes and shaping their policies accordingly. It is therefore plausible to argue that Türkiye's enduring relationship with the Western-centric international system has exerted an indubitable and far-reaching impact on the nation's trajectory. This influence has been particularly evident throughout Türkiye's nation-building process, as well as the sweeping reforms implemented during this transformative era, ultimately shaping its foreign policy landscape (Zürcher, 2017).

One significant facet of Türkiye's engagement with the West that warrants thorough examination is the alphabet reform, a pivotal moment in the nation's history. On the 1st of November, 1928, Türkiye enacted the "Law on the Acceptance and Application of Turkish Letters," officially implementing the adoption and acceptance of the Latin alphabet, herein referred to as "Turkish Letters," as the standard script for the Turkish language (Tongul, 2004). This profound linguistic transformation represented a departure from the previously employed Arabic-based Ottoman script. The reform was a deliberate and calculated response to the establishment of a Western-centric international system, mirroring the prevalent trends and practices of other Western nations.

With all this, I would like to emphasize at this point that Türkiye's pursuit of independence through a national struggle against Western powers may seem contradictory in light of its subsequent alignment with Western influences. However, this apparent paradox can be reconciled by recognizing that Türkiye's struggle for independence was not an outright rejection of Western values or principles but rather a call for self-determination and sovereignty. Consequently, an in-depth exploration of Türkiye's complex and evolving relationship with the West remains essential for comprehending the intricacies of its present stance and the enduring impact of this historical interaction. At this point, the application of a conceptual framework has the potential to help us understand this spiral of relationships.

Ayşe Zarakol has made a commendable contribution in her work entitled "After Defeat." In this scholarly endeavor, Zarakol delves into the intricate dynamics of Türkiye, Russia, and Japan as non-Western entities, and their subsequent relations with the West following their historical setbacks. It is essential to clarify that the notion of "defeat" in this context does not solely pertain to military conflicts but rather encompasses the profound civilizational struggle endured by these assertive powers, each endowed with rich traditions and histories, as they found themselves overshadowed by the hegemony of the Western world during the 19th century .

In her work, Zarakol explores the influence of Erving Goffman's "stigma" theory and Norbert Elias's "the Established and the Outsiders" distinctions on understanding the effect of the western-centered international system on Türkiye. Zarakol argues that

Türkiye's need to be respected and compensation for historical injustices serves as a key factor shaping its both foreign and domestic policy decisions (Zarakol, 2010: 24).

Choosing such a path by not using American international relations theories, and her work has been successful and has been awarded many awards. In theories where military or economic power is considered important, the importance of the West-East distinction in the international system may be overlooked. Because, although many events are not very important in terms of economic or military, they cause important results in international relations.

Goffman's theory highlights the presence of norms and rules rooted in tradition and custom within societies. These norms engender certain expectations from society members, distinguishing between those who meet these expectations and are deemed "normal," and those who fall short and are stigmatized. For instance, in a society where the established members are of a specific ethnicity, religion, or race, individuals possessing these characteristics are considered normal, and expectations are shaped accordingly. Conversely, individuals lacking dominant ethnic, religious, sexual, or racial identity characteristics become stigmatized outsiders. Zarakol underscores Goffman's theory by emphasizing that stigmatized individuals are often despised, viewed with suspicion, and may encounter mistreatment or discrimination, at best. Furthermore, stigmatized individuals are keenly aware of their own marginalized status. While Goffman's theory primarily focuses on individual experiences, Zarakol extends its application to the social and international levels, effectively achieving her intended purpose (Zarakol, 2010: 29 - 31).

In addition to Erving Goffman's "stigma" theory, Zarakol also draws upon Norbert Elias's "the Established and the Outsiders" distinctions to establish the theoretical framework for her work. Elias's study sheds light on the hierarchical structure of society, wherein the oldest or first settlers hold the decision-making and rule-making positions. Elias's work provides valuable insights into the role of historical settlement and the perception of being the first inhabitants in determining social positions and power dynamics (Zarakol, 2010: 39-35).

Elias's observational study supports the conclusion that the perception of superiority stems from being the oldest inhabitants or those who possess a sense of being the original settlers. In his examination of two working-class British neighborhoods with similar financial opportunities in the Wiston Parva settlement, Elias noticed that despite their commonalities, one neighborhood regarded itself as superior in every aspect. Interestingly, the other neighborhood also subscribed to this notion. According to Elias, even if the residents of this neighborhood did not personally feel inferior, they held the belief that their neighborhood was inferior, causing them to experience a sense of shame (Zarakol, 2010: 17 - 19).

In fact, the primary distinction between the two neighborhoods may be the difference in their length of existence, with the neighborhood perceived as superior having a longer history compared to the other. The shared culture, history, and sense of cohesion among the residents of the old neighborhood facilitate the exclusion of newcomers and contribute to the stigmatization they experience. This observation aligns with Elias's theory, which suggests that the social dynamics within a community are shaped by the interplay between established members and those who are considered outsiders. The established members, rooted in their long-standing presence, assume positions of authority and decision-making power. In contrast, the outsiders, who lack the historical ties and cultural cohesion of the established group, often find themselves marginalized and subjected to social stigmatization.

By incorporating these theories into her analysis, Zarakol sheds light on how hierarchical international system, rooted in notions of superiority and inferiority, can influence the behavior and decision-making processes of states in the international arena. The application of Goffman's stigma theory and Elias's Established-Outsider framework allows for a nuanced realization and description of the critical role of historical identity in shaping domestic and foreign policy and international relations dynamics.

Zarakol argues that the characteristics described in the two theories are applicable to the modern international system. She draws a comparison between Western countries, which form the foundation of the international system, and the Established ones for the neighborhood, highlighting their privileged status. Conversely, she likens newly

emerging countries in the era of globalization to newcomers, suggesting their position as outsiders seeking recognition. During the 19th century, states that did not conform to Western norms were stigmatized and internalized this stigma. Non-Western state communities keenly felt this sentiment during the process of modernization. While some countries, such as North Korea, adopted assertively isolationist approaches, most nations pursued domestic and foreign policies aligned with Western ideals to overcome the stigma. This involved comprehensive reforms and a quest for modernity as a means to gain acceptance and legitimacy in international relations. By adjusting their policies and engaging with global norms and institutions, states sought to transcend the stigma associated with non-Westernness and secure their position in the international community (Zarakol, 2010: 52-59).

Zarakol emphasizes the two choices that stigmatized actors face in response to societal stigma. The first choice is to strive for normalization, which manifests in two different ways. In the first approach, actors opt to rectify the attributes that have caused their stigmatization. For instance, individuals may undergo cosmetic surgery to eliminate physical imperfections. Such symbolic and visible preferences of states can be given as an example. The second approach involves actors choosing a transitional path to achieve normalization. However, if there are noticeable differences that hinder seamless transition, the attainment of complete normalization becomes challenging. For example, if there are overt dissimilarities that cannot be easily overcome, the transition may not be feasible. This highlights the complex nature of the choices confronted by stigmatized actors in their pursuit of acceptance and integration into societal norms (Zarakol, 2010: 19-23).

Zarakol describes the rectifying action as a reasonable approach for states to deal with the stigma labels. However, there are also examples that resemble the second option of normalization. Referring to Tonybee, Zarakol shows the attitudes of Greece and Eastern European countries against their historical backgrounds in order to be included in the international system (Toynbee, 1917), (Zarakol, 2010: 129). The historical differences with the dominant elements of the international system are rejected by these countries and considered as an unpleasant coincidence. The Greeks view the 500-year Ottoman era as an interruption, establishing a common connection with Europe through a bridge built on the ancient Greek heritage. Similarly, in Eastern European

countries, their Soviet past is seen as an unwanted interruption in history, serving a similar purpose and manner. These examples demonstrate how states attempt to navigate their historical narratives to overcome stigmatization and establish a sense of continuity and connection with the broader international system. By reframing their pasts and emphasizing shared values or historical linkages, these states seek to transition and integrate into the prevailing norms and structures of the international community (Zarakol, 2010: 126-135).

As evidenced by the preferences of Eastern European countries and Greece, elements that have the potential to stigmatize identity are perceived as incidental and non-essential, necessitating correction as they are imposed from external sources. However, for countries that lack commonalities with Western nations, which dominate the core of the international system, rectification becomes a formidable challenge. In line with Goffman's theory, even if successful rectification is achieved, it does not guarantee a permanent solution. The stigma associated with a country's past continues to persist, leading to lingering skepticism and doubt. This dynamic implies the possibility of the actor relapsing into its previous stigmatized status and reverting to the position of suspicion it once occupied. Therefore, overcoming stigma and fully integrating into the international community requires sustained efforts to challenge and reshape the prevailing narratives and perceptions surrounding a nation's identity.

A significant observation lies in the distinction between the elements relinquished by Greece and Eastern European countries, which can be perceived as "otherness," and the elements that the Republic of Türkiye relinquished in its quest for inclusion in the international system. For Türkiye, the relinquished elements encompass essential components that form its ontological identity. While Greece distanced itself from its 500 years of Ottoman history, and Eastern European countries distanced themselves from their Soviet experiences, the Republic of Türkiye, in a unique manner, turned away from its own essence. The focus of this thesis centers on the alphabet reform, which will be examined from this perspective in subsequent sections. This reform serves as a notable example of the transformative process through which a nation consciously sheds elements of its historical identity to align with international norms and expectations. The analysis will attempt to examine the motivations behind this

reform, as well as the impact of the reform on Turkey's self-perception and external image, and its effects on the country's position in the global context.

Zarakol highlights that as a reaction to social stigma, the possible second option in front of stigmatized actors involves the adoption and acceptance of the stigma itself. This alternative manifests in two distinct ways. The first approach entails distancing oneself from the prevailing reality and embracing a positive interpretation of the essence of one's own social identity. For instance, the Soviets viewed the Western order as illegitimate and upheld the order they established under their leadership as the "correct" one. Similarly, Iran's defiance of the prevailing norms in the current international system, seeking to replace them with its own versions of reality, serves as another illustrative example. In the second scenario, the actor derives pride and dignity from issues and challenges that are labeled as stigmatic. This manifestation is evident in countries like Türkiye and Japan, which serve as cultural and geopolitical bridges between the East and the West. By leveraging their unique position, these countries demonstrate a sense of pride and resilience in the face of stigmatizing factors. The exploration of these alternative responses expands our understanding of how stigmatized actors navigate their position within the international system and sheds light on the intricate dynamics of identity construction and agency (Zarakol, 2010: 22-23).

In the context of stigmatized actors, the timing of when the stigma becomes evident plays a crucial role in shaping their subsequent actions and responses. When actors become aware that their own identity has been stigmatized from the outset, it often necessitates a radical correction or transformation of their past. Conversely, for those who have recently entered a new social context, knowing the existence of the stigma from the very beginning, their existence is shaped by adhering to the boundaries established by their new environment (Zarakol, 2010). The recognition of stigma holds significant implications for a country's relationship with the international system. Many post-colonial societies have formed their national identities with a conscious acknowledgment of the historical stain associated with colonization. However, countries like Türkiye and Japan, at a later stage, came to realize that their own identities were marked by stigma from their very origins. Consequently, they have

adopted strategies and behaviors that reflect this awareness, aligning with the earlier discussions on how stigmatized actors respond to their circumstances.

### **1.8. Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis claims that the main reason behind the alphabet reform was the correction of the non-Western stigma represented by the Arabic alphabet. Thus, a non-Western stigma, which reminds of the religious past of the Ottoman Empire, has been corrected in order for Türkiye to become secularized and find a place for itself in the international system, where Western countries are in the center position and the main element in decision-making processes.

This thesis endeavors to explore the historical background behind the adoption of Western norms and values by the Turkish political elite and intellectuals, thus shedding light on the formation of a stigmatized identity. The second chapter delves into Kemalist claims that the Arabic alphabet inherently hindered development, and it subsequently challenges the validity of these assertions. In the third chapter, the focus shifts towards a comprehensive analysis of the two-language policy and language theory, integral components of the alphabet reform, which collectively aimed at secularizing Turkish society by targeting Islamic elements. The fourth chapter addresses the impact of Türkiye's struggles against the West on its national identity, despite efforts towards secularization. As the thesis contends, Türkiye's quest for inclusion within the Western-centric international system, evident in the alphabet reform and reflected in its foreign policy during Mustafa Kemal's era, might be seen as an endeavor to rectify a perceived stigma. Finally, this section examines Türkiye's Euroscepticism, juxtaposed with its aspiration for Westernization, while also addressing the Sevres syndrome phenomenon. Through this investigation, the thesis offers insights into the intricate complexities of Türkiye's identity formation and its quest for legitimacy and acceptance within the global context.

## CHAPTER II

# IN THE NAME OF PROGRESS: SCRUTINIZING TÜRKİYE'S ALPHABET REFORM AND ITS JUSTIFICATIONS

### 2.1. Introduction

The acceptance of the Latin script as the country's official alphabet in Türkiye, as part of the Kemalist reforms, has been a significant and controversial event in the country's history. The Kemalists, who championed this reform, put forth several arguments to legitimize their decision and justify the transition away from the Arabic script. This chapter aims to critically evaluate these arguments and delve into the motivations behind the alphabet reform.

The Kemalist perspective asserts that the Arabic alphabet posed a substantial hindrance to Türkiye's progress and development. They argued that the Arabic script made it challenging to accurately read and write Turkish, thus impeding the nation's literacy rate. In contrast, they maintained that the Latin alphabet was better suited to represent the Turkish language and its sounds, offering improved readability and pronunciation. By aligning the script with the spoken language, the Kemalists believed that Turkish literacy would be more accessible to the population (Dönmez, 2011: 37 – 45).

Interestingly, the Kemalists also presented a cost-based argument in favor of the Latin alphabet. They contended that utilizing the Arabic script incurred significant expenses in printing, while the Latin alphabet offered economic advantages. This cost efficiency would facilitate the dissemination of written materials, leading to increased literacy rates and wider access to information (Nedim & Asaf, 1933, 32 - 35).

Furthermore, the Kemalists argued that the Arabic script complicated foreigners' learning of Turkish and hindered their understanding and interaction with Turkish society. They asserted that by adopting the Latin alphabet, the barrier to foreign language acquisition would be lowered, thus fostering cross-cultural communication and engagement (Şengül, 2014: 325).

In this section, this paper will critically examine these Kemalist arguments, evaluate their validity, and attempt to explore alternative perspectives. By doing this, it is aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind the alphabet reform, which has been the focus of unresolved debate since its implementation.

## **2.2. Close Traces of the Alphabet Reform: The Historical Background of the Formation Process of the Reformist Mentality**

As mentioned in the introduction, according to the Kemalist argument, the sole reason for the alphabet reform is expressed through this overarching argument. This independent variable encompasses arguments such as perceiving the Arabic alphabet as the cause for the low literacy rate among Turks, its incompatibility with the Turkish language and phonetics, and the inherent difficulty of reading the Arabic alphabet. These arguments serve as the legitimizing factors behind the Kemalists' alphabet reform (Nedim & Asaf, 1933, 32 - 35).

To comprehend the development of the underlying mindset behind this argument, examining the historical events and context will provide us with perspective in understanding this issue. With the Ottoman Empire entering a period of political stagnation, efforts were made to bridge the technical / technological gap with the West through reform movements. Reforms were implemented in various areas, particularly in the military, to address this disparity. However, despite these endeavors, the aim of catching up with Western technical advancements was not fully achieved, and the political elites of the time internalized Western norms and values. Many segments of the Turkish elite, who formed the country's ruling class, sought to prevent the collapse of the empire by proposing different perspectives on the necessary paths to be taken. Works such as Yusuf Akçura's and the later Ottoman intellectual movements can be cited as examples of this (Akçura, 1976). However, the inability to prevent the

downfall of the empire and the painful experiences of the last two centuries deeply impacted a significant portion of the ruling elites. As a result, many of these governing elites perceived Western norms and standards as a key to revive the country's bygone glory. Therefore, the desire to reclaim the country's perceived golden days will have a considerable impact when examining the decision-making processes of these ruling elites, who saw Western norms and standards as a means to revive the collapsing nation (Gündüz, 2009: 191 – 212).

From this perspective, it would be fair to say that the decline and eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire had a dramatic impact on the mentality of the founding elites of the new republican regime. Historical experiences spanning from the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which followed the Ottoman-Russian War of 1774 and resulted in substantial territorial losses, to the establishment of the Republic, profoundly shaped the mindset of the founding cadres and played a crucial role in determining the trajectory of the new republic. These experiences left lasting impressions of the empire's challenges stemming from its vast territorial expanse and its adversarial stance towards the West. Consequently, the founding elites of the republic placed a strong emphasis on constructing a well-defined nation-state aligned with Western values, in order to mitigate the vulnerabilities associated with a sprawling empire and preempt potential anti-Western sentiments (Mardin, 2000).

Beginning with the reform movements, notably during the Tanzimat period, the Ottoman political and military elites were influenced by Western civilization. As a result, they adopted Western norms and values, making the transformation of the Republic of Türkiye into a Western-oriented country their primary objective. In fact, the use of the terms modernization and westernization interchangeably by these elites serves as an illustration of their mindset (Weiker, 1968: 451 – 458). However, despite their wholehearted embrace of Western standards, the historical ambitions of Western powers over Ottoman lands and the intentions unveiled through the Treaty of Sèvres engendered a lingering suspicion of the West among the Ottoman elites. These same elites, who went on to become the founders of the republic, viewed the West as an aspirational goal while maintaining a deep-seated mistrust, despite internalizing Western norms and ideals.

Considering and evaluating these factors, it becomes evident that the late Ottoman political elites, who comprised the founding cadre of the republic, effectively embodied the theory of stigma. The persistent territorial losses since Küçük Kaynarca, the technological gap with the West, and the West-centric nature of the newly formed international system led the Kemalist founding elites to acknowledge and seek to rectify the stigma. Consequently, through domestic political reforms, they eradicated all conspicuous non-Western elements associated with the Ottoman identity, thereby correcting the stigma and molding the Turkish republic into a Western-oriented and secular state aligned with Western norms and values. Simultaneously, in foreign policy, an active isolationist stance was adopted as the Kemalist regime sought to carve out a place for Türkiye within the Western-centric international system (Hale, 2012: 31-39).

The paradoxical events surrounding the foundation of Türkiye hold significant importance in shaping the stigmatized identity of the nation. Despite the founding cadres' positive embrace of the West and Western norms, the Republic of Türkiye emerged victorious in the war of national independence fought against Western and Christian countries system (Hale, 2012: 8-35) . In the Ottoman State, there were four religious groups: the Nation of Islam (comprising all Muslims), Greeks, Armenians, and Jews. The hierarchical order among these groups is in the order in which they were written above. Although the influence of the other three groups in the hierarchy increased day by day with the Tanzimat, Muslims had a privileged position in hierarchical terms due to the fact that it was an Islamic state.

However, with the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, these three above mentioned groups were categorized as second-class citizens and granted official minority status. Additionally, similar to the population exchange with Greece, their presence within the population decreased. The religious pillar of the Ottoman Empire, which held a hierarchical superiority, consisted of the Islamic nation. Yet, with the advent of the Republic, this structure underwent a transformation, leading to the emergence of a single-nation, single-official language, and secular framework centered around the Turkish nation (Kösebalaban, 2011, 1-37) .

Despite the early inclination towards secularization in the country, the presence of Islamic mobilization and skepticism towards the West influenced the secular founders to Islamize the population through measures like population exchange and deprivation of citizenship. This paradoxical situation highlights the complexities of the Turkish nation-building process. Although the country aspired to secularization, the delineation of the 'Turkish' nation based on religious grounds presents a contradictory example. While Turkish nationalism was being formulated, the State willingly implemented assimilation policies; however, individuals from various ethnic backgrounds such as Kurds, Zaza, Albanians, Bosnians, and others were included within the concept of the Turkish nation, emphasizing an inclusive approach that transcended ethnicity. Ethnic Turks were not given preferential treatment within the framework of the 'Turkish' nation (Kösebalaban, 2011).

Indeed, the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye was characterized by nationalist and historical discourses that adopted an assimilationist approach. However, non-Turkish Muslim elements were incorporated into the Turkish nation if they demonstrated proficiency in the Turkish language and embraced the secular values promoted by the republic. This assimilationist stance was applied to Muslim elements, but as long as they fulfilled the requirements set by the Kemalist regime, they were not hindered from occupying central positions within the system. This highlights that even ethnic Turks did not receive preferential treatment within the Turkish nation compared to other ethnic groups. (Akturk, 2015: 787 – 793)

When the Turkish nation-building process is examined, we can say that it is inclusive. This situation can be seen through examples such as the assimilation of non-Turkish Muslim groups like Kurds, Bosniaks, Circassians, and others who aligned with the principles of the republic. These groups, despite their distinct ethnic backgrounds, were able to become integral parts of the new Turkish nation by adopting the Turkish language and embracing the secular values promoted by the Kemalist regime. The emphasis on language proficiency and adherence to secular principles allowed for the integration of diverse ethnic and religious communities into the fabric of the Turkish nation (Akturk, 2015).

From this perspective, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the Kemalist identity. The preference of the secular Turkish Republic to distance itself from its Ottoman past and embrace a new national identity can be seen as an acknowledgement of the stigma attached to the Ottoman Empire by the Western powers. This acknowledgement reflects Türkiye's willingness to address the negative perception of the Ottoman Empire within the Western-centric international system. Additionally, it highlights the skeptical attitude of the Turkish Republic towards the West, even as it adopts Western values and norms.

One important aspect to consider is the transformation of the dominant element in the Ottoman Empire, the Muslim nation including Turks, within the context of the secular Republic of Türkiye. In the Kemalist nation-building process, the concept of the Turkish nation emerged, replacing the previously dominant Islamic identity. This shift was a significant departure from the religious basis of the Ottoman Empire and marked the establishment of a secular Republic of Türkiye.

By adopting a secular identity, Türkiye sought to form a distinct and modern national identity that was separate from its Islamic heritage. This decision reflected the desire to align with Western values and norms, which were seen as markers of progress and development. However, despite this embrace of Western ideals, Türkiye's skepticism towards the West remained evident (Akturk, 2015).

It is important to note that the skepticism towards the West does not imply a rejection of Western values and norms. Rather, it signifies a cautious approach and a desire to assert Türkiye's own national interests while engaging with the Western world. This nuanced stance can be attributed to historical experiences, including the Treaty of Sèvres and the other challenges faced by the Ottoman Empire (Guida, 2008: 37 – 43). These experiences shaped the mindset of the Kemalist elites and influenced their approach to international relations.

Kemalist identity is characterized by a simultaneous acceptance of Türkiye's own stigma on its own identity before the West and a skeptical attitude towards Western powers. The transformation in Anatolia from a religious empire to a secular Türkiye highlights the complexities of Türkiye's national identity and its navigation of the

Western-centric international system. The Kemalist approach, while embracing Western values, also seeks to protect Türkiye's national interests and assert its place in the international arena.

The concept of the Muslim nation has been replaced by the Turkish nation by the secular Türkiye. In addition to the new regime's inclination towards Western values and its embrace of secular ideology, it possessed the authority to orchestrate societal restructuring within the country. Remarkably, even though the regime had the power to do social engineering in the country as they wished, they chose to establish the Turkish nation on the basis of religious affiliation rather than ethnicity, thereby delineating the boundaries of this concept. By adopting this approach, the regime sought to redefine the collective identity of the populace, emphasizing their adherence to the religious principles of Islam rather than their shared ethnic heritage. Nevertheless, the delineation of Islamic boundaries explicated herein is established by Kemalism, exhibiting a coherent framework amid stringent secular requisites that evince no incongruity with Western norms and standards.

In the last Ottoman assembly, despite the presence of non-Muslim deputies, the assembly established during the rise of the Ankara movement exclusively comprised Muslim representatives. This discrepancy underscores a pivotal example of the shift from a religiously diverse assembly to one that was predominantly Muslim-oriented. Moreover, the treatment of immigrant populations offers further insight into the nuances of ethnic nationalism. Notably, the rejection of the Gagauz people's immigration request to Türkiye elucidates that if nationalism had been predicated solely on ethnic grounds, such a denial would not have transpired. Conversely, the migration of Cretan Muslims, Bosnians, and Albanians, who lacked proficiency in Turkish, was facilitated without hindrance (Akturk, 2015, 787 - 793), (İçduygu, 2015: 85 – 92).

The prevailing restriction on the immigration of non-Muslim Turks to Türkiye, coupled with the admission of Muslim individuals who lack Turkish language proficiency but do not belong to the Turkish ethnicity, signifies that the contours of nationalist boundaries are delineated predominantly along religious lines rather than ethnicity. This disparity becomes evident when contrasting the policies observed in

countries like Germany and Japan, where official ethnic migration is incentivized through economic measures, with the distinct stance adopted by the Republic of Türkiye. It is noteworthy to underscore the population exchange between Greece and Türkiye, a historically significant event, which was fundamentally informed by religious affiliation (Aktürk, 2011: 131-55).

In summary, the founders of the Republic, influenced by the Islamic mobilization and their triumph in the independence war over Western and Christian powers, shaped the concepts and values of the nascent state within the framework of Islam, which represented a shared heritage in Anatolian territories vis-à-vis the Christian West. Simultaneously, they aimed to position Türkiye within the international system by embracing Western norms and standards, making the attainment of these ideals a prominent goal of the Republic. This juxtaposition gives rise to a paradoxical aspect of the Kemalist Republican identity. Furthermore, despite Islam occupying a central position in the boundaries set by Kemalism for the Republican regime, it underwent a restructuring as determined and transformed by Kemalism. Numerous reforms were implemented to eradicate visible Islamic features, secularizing the Republic of Türkiye and aiming to elevate it to the level of contemporary civilization, as envisioned by Kemalism. In this context, the alphabet reform undertaken by Kemalism holds particular significance as an instrument for correcting the perceived stigma attached to the Turkish identity. The proponents of Kemalism advocated for the alphabet reform by marshaling a series of arguments, centered around the central premise that Islam had posed impediments to technical progress.

### **2.3. Garbcılar**

The proponents of the alphabet reform, in other words Kemalists, contend that the utilization of the Arabic alphabet for the Turkish language poses a substantial impediment to technical progress, modernization, and societal advancement. They assert that the Arabic script, which had been employed for nearly a millennium by the Ottoman Empire and preceding Turkish states, lacks the capacity to effectively and comprehensively accommodate the Turkish language, hindering its functionality as a means for fostering development. According to Kemalist perspectives, this perceived limitation obstructs the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge across various

scientific, technical, and technological domains, impeding overall progress. The intricate and ornate nature of the Arabic script, as advocated by Kemalist claims, complicates the realization of these developmental objectives, thereby constraining the Turkish nation's ability to keep abreast of global advancements. As a result, in the Kemalist view, the alphabet reform was deemed necessary to facilitate a more efficient and compatible writing system, conducive to the pursuit of modernization and knowledge dissemination in Türkiye, enabling the nation to actively participate in the trajectory of global progress.

The perception of the Arabic alphabet as a natural obstacle to keep up with technical developments in the use of Turkish and to compete with contemporary civilizations in this lane dates back to the late Ottoman period, which included the claims that Islam was an obstacle to development and progress. At this point, examining the effects of the group known as Garbçılar on recent history, including both the empire and the republic, will help shed light on the subject.

The 19th century marked a tumultuous period for the Ottoman Empire, characterized by territorial losses resulting from war defeats and a diminished global reputation, prompting a fervent pursuit of regaining former strength and prestige. Against this backdrop, Westernization emerged as a perceived avenue for salvation and rejuvenation. Consequently, the matter of restoring the Ottoman Empire's former splendor and uplifting society became a prevalent and extensively deliberated theme among intellectuals. Eager to play an active role in this endeavor, intellectuals sought to contribute to the realization of the shared aspiration. Among these intellectuals, the 'Garbçılar,' or proponents of Westernization, assumed particular significance, warranting examination concerning their proclivities and orientations. Their engagement with Western ideas and institutions reflected their belief in the potential of Westernization as a catalyst for societal and national rejuvenation. Thus, exploring the motivations and outlooks of these intellectuals offers valuable insights into the intellectual climate and ideological underpinnings of the Ottoman Empire during this transformative era (Hanioglu, 1997: 133 – 136).

Intellectuals, whose origins are significantly traced back to the 18th century, held the conviction that Westernization was imperative, grounded in the belief that merely

adopting military technology would not be enough to compensate for the technological gap between the West and the Empire. Initially contributing to various magazines and newspapers during the early years of the Constitutional Monarchy, these writers later congregated their perspectives and ideas within the journal *İctihat*. Eminent figures such as Abdullah Cevdet, Celal Nuri, and Kılıçzade Hakkı emerged as prominent advocates of the Garbçılar group. A thorough examination of Abdullah Cevdet, who stands out as a prominent figure among the Garbçılar, and his followers who adhered to the extreme Westernism concept represented by him, assumes significance in comprehending the most radical tenets of Westernism pertaining to religion. Additionally, exploring the correlation between these ideas and the era's reforms provides crucial insights into the relationship between intellectual thought and the transformative reforms that unfolded during this period of profound historical significance (Uyanık, 2014: 189 – 205).

Western society began to be perceived as superior to the values espoused by the Ottoman Empire, leading certain Westernist intellectuals to stigmatize the non-Western norms and traditions inherent in the Ottoman social fabric. In this context, Abdullah Cevdet emerged as a prominent Western-oriented intellectual. His fervent admiration for the West, coupled with his advocacy of biological materialism, engendered a condescending outlook towards the values that underpinned the Ottoman societal structure. Abdullah Cevdet's role as an ardent Western enthusiast, and the philosophical ideas he embraced, hold paramount importance in comprehending the intellectual landscape of that era. Notably, his stance, along with those of others, sought to undermine efforts during Abdulhamid Khan's reign aimed at safeguarding the state, society, and religion. Particularly influential among medical and military students, Abdullah Cevdet and his associates endeavored to reshape societal life through the promulgation of a new culture, ideology, and discourse, neglecting the religious and ideological foundations that traditionally underpinned the Ottoman social order. This agenda of transformation engendered tensions with established societal norms and fueled debates concerning the direction of the Ottoman Empire's development during this pivotal period (Kılıç, 2005).

In the perspective of Abdullah Cevdet and his intellectual circle, religion was perceived as a formidable barrier to social progress and development, advocating

instead for positivist science as the preferred replacement. His writings prominently featured ideas on Darwinism, wherein science was esteemed as the religion of the intellectual elite, while religion was construed as a mechanism for controlling the populace. Accordingly, Cevdet authored articles positing that religion, by adopting Islamic terminology, facilitated the westernization and modernization of Ottoman society. Nevertheless, these writings, couched in Islamic terms, were deemed unsuccessful in achieving their intended impact. Subsequently, Abdullah Cevdet adopted a more explicit approach, actively contesting Islam. He engaged in translating several anti-Islamic texts, including Reinhart Dozy's works replete with hostility towards religious aspects, including the Islamic prophet (Hanioğlu, 1997: 138). This antagonistic disposition towards religion endured even during his exile, evident in his contributions to Istanbul publications, where he boldly asserted that Islam posed the most significant impediment to the Ottoman Empire's development and modernization. This extensive corpus of articles and translations propelled him to prominence among anti-Islamic intellectuals. The ultimate objective underlying these endeavors was to establish a "scientific religion" to supplant Islam in the societal discourse, illustrating the intense ideological debates surrounding the transformation of religious, philosophical, and scientific paradigms during this historical epoch (Hanioğlu, 1997: 138 - 144).

While the Westernist faction generally shared a common outlook on most matters, their unanimity faltered on certain issues, evident notably during the Balkan Wars. The emergence of anti-Western sentiments in society during this period also resonated within the Garbçılar group. In response, Celal Nuri vociferously criticized the West's stance towards the Ottoman Empire, employing expressions laden with hostility. Conversely, Abdullah Cevdet sought to mitigate this anti-Western sentiment, encouraging his associates to adopt a more restrained approach. However, post-war, the schism between the Garbçılar on this matter waned, and publications espousing anti-Islamic sentiments persisted. This episode highlights the internal diversity and nuanced perspectives within the Westernist camp, exemplifying how the Balkan Wars triggered differing reactions within the group (Hanioğlu, 1997: 141). Despite initial disagreements, their joint efforts to oppose Islam and defend a scientific religion were seen as the common denominator after the war, and activities continued on the same lines (Buzpinar, 2007: 247 -255).

In addition to the attempts at modernization and westernization utilizing Islamic terminology, the Garbcılar propagated the notion that Islam and modern life could not coexist harmoniously. They openly expressed their desire to forsake Islam and its values in favor of aligning with European religion, science, modernity, laws, and regulations. To support this argument, they resorted to insulting references towards Islam, disseminating articles and images advancing these views in the aforementioned journal. For instance, Kılıçzade presented the notion of adopting European insurance practices as a reasonable alternative to the traditional Islamic supplication "ya Hafız" (O Protector), particularly for fire protection, exemplifying the Westernization envisioned by this group. Moreover, almost all of the Islamic rituals, including fasting, prayer, veiling and others, were openly criticized by the Garbcılar, as they saw that westernization and modernization efforts using an Islamic language did not yield positive results. Despite the closure of the journal due to their aggressive stance towards Islam, they persisted, establishing new publications with different names, maintaining their unwavering dedication to their objectives. Notably, Abdullah Cevdet, a prominent figure among the Garbcılar, went as far as promoting the religion of Bahá'ism, and in doing so, he did not hesitate to insult the Islamic prophet. Moreover, he controversially advocated the importation of men from Hungary and Germany to enhance the westernization of the Turkish race. This fervent advocacy for radical changes to religious and cultural norms exemplifies the extremities to which the Garbcılar aspired, exemplifying the profound and contentious debates surrounding the transformations during this period of intellectual history (Tansü, 2018).

The Garbcılar, in addition to their open critique of Islam during the late Ottoman era, advanced a third argument centered on the necessity of fashioning a new ethical framework for Muslims, asserting that Islam could not adequately adapt to modern developments. They advocated for the establishment of an ethical system entirely detached from religion, akin to the reforms advocated by figures such as Martin Luther. This movement represented a significant departure within the Ottoman intellectual milieu, as it marked the first instance of overt criticism directed at Islam. Concurrently, the Garbcılar espoused materialist perspectives, actively disseminating these views through their publications in the magazine. By championing the creation of a new, secularized ethical foundation divorced from religious influences, the

Garbcılar sought to pave the way for a society responsive to contemporary progress and ideals (Hanioglu, 1997: 143).

An additional significant aspect worth noting is Kılıçzade Hakkı's Westernization plan, which he artfully presents as a utopian dream to avoid legal scrutiny. The language employed in the plan evokes a sense of pervasive corruption within Islam, as the majority of comments pertaining to Islamic matters reflect both grievances and an earnest attempt to rectify perceived flaws. Evidently, religion constitutes a central focus within the plan.

Criticisms are directed not only towards the ruling dynasty and monarchy but also encompass the vision of an ideal religious structure in modern society, calling for fundamental reforms in the Islamic order. Specifically, provisions concerning women, such as veiling and marriage regulations, come under harsh scrutiny, while dervish lodges and madrasas are identified as hindrances to progress, advocating a shift towards the Western education model to break away from Islamic traditions in education.

This sentiment is epitomized by the proposal to close the Süleymaniye madrasah and establish schools akin to the French College system. Moreover, secret criticism emphasizes the need for Islamic courts to function effectively. These examples are indicative of the broader portrayal of Islam as an obstacle impeding social advancement and development, underscoring the overarching theme throughout the text (Altıntaş, 2008, 93 - 100).

Kılıçzade Hakkı's Westernization plan stands as a notable example of intellectual discourse during the transformative period in Ottoman history. The plan, artfully presented as a utopian dream, employs language that highlights perceived corruption within Islam and directs criticism towards various aspects of the Islamic order. Veiling, marriage regulations, dervish lodges, and madrasas all come under scrutiny, with a call for Western education models to replace traditional Islamic methods. The Westernization plan, with its critique of Islamic elements, reveals the deeply divisive and intricate nature of the intellectual debates surrounding religious reform and societal transformation.

Upon perusing the literature on the Garbcılar, devoid of historical context, one might easily dismiss their aspirations as an impractical utopia. However, historical developments reveal that the very ideals designed by the Garbcılar found realization with the establishment of Republic of Türkiye. As Hanioglu asserts, during the Second Constitutional Period, the Garbcılar proposed the entirety of the republic's reforms, directly or indirectly linked to religious matters. A careful examination of the nature of these reforms and the arguments employed to justify them underscores the alignment with the core tenet of the Garbcılar's discourse, suggesting that Islam posed a hindrance to progress.

Hanioglu further contends that the Garbcılar's stance, advocating a war against established religions, resonated with the principles of the Republican People's Party. Moreover, many previously censored translations came to light with the support of the republican regime, thereby promoting Garbcılar ideas. The regime's alignment with Garbcılar ideals is further exemplified by the appointment of prominent figures, Kılıçzade Hakkı and Celal Nuri, to the parliament, signifying a significant endorsement of their views (Hanioglu, 1997: 147).

Of particular interest is the alleged support extended to Abdullah Cevdet, as claimed in Hanioglu's work, whereby Mustafa Kemal purportedly urged Cevdet to transform his extensive writings into action. Nevertheless, public opposition, stemming from Cevdet's alleged involvement in Kurdish nationalism during the occupation of Istanbul and his controversial proposal to import breeding males from Germany and Hungary to enhance the Turkish race, seemingly hindered his appointment as a member of parliament (Hanioglu, 1997: 147 - 151).

This historical narrative highlights the remarkable confluence between the Garbcılar's vision and the transformative trajectory of the early Turkish Republic, shedding light on how intellectual currents during this period substantively influenced the nation's foundational principles and reformist pursuits.

In conclusion, the Garbcılar's seemingly utopian aspirations found an unexpected path to realization through the establishment of Türkiye. The alignment of their ideas with the reformist agenda of the early Republic, as demonstrated by Hanioglu's research,

underscores the significance of their role in shaping the nation's foundational principles. The resonance of the Garbçılar's stance against established religions with the principles of the Republican People's Party, along with the regime's support for censored translations and the appointment of prominent figures espousing Garbçılar views, further solidifies the influence of their ideas. Nonetheless, the alleged support for Abdullah Cevdet also reveals instances of public opposition and controversy surrounding some aspects of the Garbçılar's ideology.

#### **2.4. Evaluating the Kemalist Claims: Arabic Alphabet as an Obstacle to Development**

The preceding discourse has sought to illuminate the foundational impetuses that underpinned the alphabet reform, corroborating its convergence with the Garbçılar's contentions that Islam constituted an impediment to development and progress, as substantiated by historical context and the nascent practices of the Turkish Republic. Central to this reform was the Arabic alphabet, serving as a symbolic manifestation of Islam. Consequently, the reform unfolded on the premise that the Arabic script, intrinsically associated with Islam, inherently hindered societal advancement. This situation is clearly stated in the official booklet published by the Ministry of National Education in the 10th anniversary of the Republic. (Nedim & Asaf, 1933, 34 - 35) Persisting to this day, the reform continues to garner support premised on these enduring arguments. By challenging the Islamic elements visibly entwined with the Arabic alphabet, reform proponents aspired to instigate a linguistic metamorphosis that mirrored their ambitions for modernization and Westernization. However, a crucial inquiry emerges as to the veracity of claims asserting the inherent obstructionist nature of the alphabet and its purported incompatibility with the Turkish language. The examination of whether these claims rest on empirical data and align with historical realities will elucidate the validity of their contentions, consequently shaping our comprehension of the underlying motivations and outcomes of the alphabet reform within the context of Turkish sociopolitical development (Lewis, 2019: 195 – 213).

Alongside the alphabet reform, the inclusion of Latin alphabet embellishments represents an additional endeavor to legitimize the reform. Upon scrutinizing the assertions espoused by the reform's proponents, a noticeable trend emerges wherein

the Latin alphabet is extolled while the Arabic alphabet is disparaged. From the Kemalist standpoint, two distinct inferences can be drawn from the claim that the Arabic alphabet constitutes an obstacle to development.

The first inference is that the Latin alphabet inherently surpasses all other writing systems in terms of technical and technological advancement, making it a superior instrument for societal progress. For this reason, societies utilizing the Latin script are expected to exhibit a favorable position concerning technical and technological development, owing to the perceived efficacy of this alphabet in fostering progress.

Conversely, the second inference posits that the Arabic alphabet fares poorly in terms of development when compared to the majority of existing writing systems due to inherent limitations in its design. Consequently, societies employing the Arabic alphabet are presumed to lag behind in terms of technical and technological progress.

The veracity of Kemalist claims hinges upon the validation of either of the two aforementioned inferences. Failing to establish the truthfulness of either inference would render the claims, which serve as the foundational basis and rationale for the reform, invalid. Consequently, such an outcome would necessitate the exploration of alternative reasons underpinning the reform's initiation. Ascertaining the accuracy of these inferences is imperative to the substantiation of the reform's ideological underpinnings, and by extension, its legitimacy within the broader sociopolitical context of Türkiye.

If we direct our attention to the first inference, it follows that a presumption arises: the vast majority of societies employing the Latin alphabet should exhibit a technological and technical advancement surpassing those using other writing systems. In this context, the selection of an appropriate metric to gauge technical development assumes paramount significance. As an internationally recognized and accepted criterion, the tally of Nobel science awards presents an avenue for shedding light on this matter. Evaluating the distribution of Nobel science prizes, we observe that merely four nations surpass Japan in this regard. Among the countries that utilize the Latin alphabet, six nations precede Russia, while 14 such nations rank ahead of both Israel and China (Nobel Prize Stats).

As evident from the data presented, numerous countries employing the Latin alphabet lag behind those with non-Latin alphabets, such as Russia, China, Japan, and Israel, when considering the distribution of Nobel science awards. However, even if the outcome were reversed, it is essential to acknowledge that various factors could have influenced such disparities. These factors encompass a wide array of variables, including the distinct educational systems within the countries, cumulative investments in research and development, prevailing economic conditions, and the overall conducive environment for scientific pursuits within each nation. However, Kemalist claims put forward a claim that is reduced to the alphabet on the way of development. Consequently, attributing the outcomes solely to the choice of writing system would necessitate careful consideration and contextualization of these multifaceted elements that underpin scientific achievements on a global scale.

In addition to the statistical considerations, it is pertinent to recognize that several countries, namely South Korea, Japan, India, China, Russia, and Israel, have demonstrated commendable progress and prowess in technology adoption and technical advancement. These nations are by no means inferior to countries employing the Latin alphabet in these domains. Ascertaining technological development demands a comprehensive analysis that encompasses diverse factors, including investment in research and development, human capital, innovation policies, and technological infrastructure, which collectively contribute to the dynamic landscape of technological progress across the global stage. Therefore, departing from a singular metric, such as the choice of writing system, it is imperative to embrace a multidimensional perspective when evaluating the technological achievements of different nations.

As expounded through the aforementioned analyses, adopting a multifaceted approach to evaluating technological development negates the possibility of making a sweeping inference that countries utilizing the Latin alphabet inherently hold a definitive advantage over those employing non-Latin alphabets in this realm. The intricate interplay of various socio-economic, educational, and infrastructural factors significantly influences a nation's technological progress. Hence, any such inference asserting a dominant victory of Latin-alphabet countries in technical and technological development lacks substantive grounds and oversimplifies the intricate dynamics that underlie the technological landscape on a global scale. Consequently, a comprehensive

and nuanced assessment is indispensable to discerning the multifarious elements contributing to each nation's technological standing and fostering a more accurate understanding of the complexities involved. In addition, the achievements of the countries using the non-Latin alphabet as illustrated above undermine the inference that supports Kemalist claims, even if the subject is reduced to the alphabet.

The second inference posits that the Arabic alphabet exhibits inherent limitations, resulting in its purported poor performance regarding technical and technological development compared to the majority of existing writing systems. Such an audacious assertion warrants the examination of historical evidence to ascertain whether societies employing the Arabic alphabet have indeed been in an unfavorable position concerning technical and technological advancement, especially when juxtaposed with other writing systems that have coexisted throughout history. In order for this assumption to be valid, societies using the Arabic alphabet must have technically and technologically lagged behind societies using other writing systems for a considerable part of history. In response to this claim, the following paragraphs will present a historical perspective, starting with the early Islamic conquests against the Sassanid and Byzantine Empires, to ascertain whether the inferences about the Arabic alphabet's limitations align with the accomplishments of these conquests (Sivrioğlu, 2015). Subsequently, an analysis of Islamic states established throughout history will shed light on their significant contributions to the international system and their technological advancements. Moreover, a specific focus on the Andalusian Umayyad State will provide a comprehensive understanding of its technological progress facilitated by the Arabic alphabet, ultimately challenging the notion of its inferiority in relation to Western states during that period (Budak, 2016, 169).

The historical context of the early Islamic conquests undermines the claim that the Arabic alphabet hinders technical and technological progress. The Islamic forces, despite utilizing the Arabic script, achieved notable victories against the formidable Sassanid and Byzantine Empires during the same period. The conquests' success against these powerful adversaries underscores the military prowess and strategic acumen of the early Islamic forces, thus questioning the presumed negative impact of the Arabic alphabet on their technological capabilities. Such military triumphs indicate that the Arabic script did not impede the acquisition and application of advanced

knowledge and technologies, as demonstrated by the victorious outcomes in the face of sophisticated superpowers.

Taking into consideration the historical context of the early Islamic conquests, it becomes apparent that the literacy rate during that period was relatively low, attributable to prevailing social conditions and requirements. In light of this, the notion that the victory of the Islamic State over two superpowers was an endeavor to demonstrate that the Arabic alphabet did not impede development might surprise those unfamiliar with the tenets of the Kemalists' claims. Nevertheless, the efforts to counter the prevailing assumptions stemming from the reforms, which were founded on the premise that the alphabet served as an obstacle to progress, have brought us to the present juncture.

A comprehensive examination of Islamic states throughout history reveals their significant contributions to the international system and technological advancements. These states, characterized by their use of the Arabic alphabet, played pivotal roles in promoting knowledge, scholarship, and scientific progress. For instance, the Abbasid Caliphate fostered an intellectual renaissance known as the Golden Age of Islam, marked by remarkable achievements in astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and other fields. The sophisticated irrigation systems in the Islamic world, as seen in regions like the Iberian Peninsula and the Middle East, underscore the practical applications of technology during these periods. These examples illustrate that the Arabic script did not hinder technological growth and innovation, but rather facilitated intellectual and scientific advancements that significantly influenced global knowledge and progress (Sivrioğlu, 2015).

A pertinent example to challenge the assumption of the Arabic alphabet's limitations can be found in the Andalusian Umayyad State. Despite employing the Arabic script, this state exhibited remarkable technical and technological developments during its period of prominence. The Andalusian Umayyad State, located in present-day Spain and Portugal, flourished from the 8th to the 15th centuries. It achieved exceptional advancements in fields such as architecture, irrigation, mathematics, astronomy, physics and agriculture. The grand architectural marvels of Cordoba, including the Great Mosque of Cordoba, are exemplary of the state's engineering and artistic

brilliance. The Andalusian Umayyad State's progress in various disciplines indicates that the Arabic alphabet did not constrain its technical and technological achievements, but rather served as a conduit for scholarly and scientific endeavors. Moreover, during this era, the Andalusian Umayyad State held a superior position relative to Western states, further dispelling the notion of the Arabic script's purported limitations on technical prowess (Hourani, 1970: 143-156), (Vernet & Samsó, 2019: 243-261).

Throughout its existence, the Ottoman Empire employed the Arabic alphabet as its writing system for Turkish, spanning from its foundation until its eventual collapse. Remarkably, even during its declining years, the empire displayed remarkable development and competitiveness against leading European states in numerous domains. Notably, during its ascendant period, the Ottoman Empire surpassed Western countries in terms of military and technical advancements, flourishing while Europe was still in the Middle Ages. This era represented the empire's most prosperous days, witnessing significant scientific progress across various fields, ultimately elevating the Ottoman Empire to superpower status. This superpower quality endured for many years, as the empire continued to assert its influence and dominance on the global stage. Despite employing the Arabic script, the Ottoman Empire's achievements in military, technology, and science challenge the notion that the script limited its technical and technological progress. The success of the Ottoman Empire in many areas throughout history is a testament to the ability of a society to develop and excel in many areas, regardless of the writing system used (Ihsanoglu, 2006).

The comparison of technical and technological developments between Türkiye and the Ottoman Empire within their respective historical context sheds light on the complexities of the alphabet reform debate. Advocates of the reform often cite the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as a justification for their position, portraying the empire as stagnant during its last days. However, historical evidence reveals that the Ottoman Empire, during its zenith, stood shoulder to shoulder with developed nations of its time, excelling in military prowess, scientific advances, and statecraft. Republic of Türkiye, adopting the Latin alphabet, has encountered challenges in achieving its envisioned development goals, even after more than a century since its establishment. Japan, despite facing devastating military destruction during World War II, underwent rapid post-war reconstruction, achieving significant technical and technological

advancements and attaining a respected position in the international system. Crucially, Japan accomplished this while preserving its own national alphabet. These contrasting experiences raise questions about the direct link between alphabet choice and a nation's development trajectory. They challenge the notion that the Arabic alphabet inherently hindered progress in the Ottoman Empire and suggest that numerous other factors, such as geopolitical circumstances, institutional changes, and economic policies, play pivotal roles in shaping a country's development. The case of Japan serves as an illustrative example of a nation achieving remarkable progress without altering its writing system, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of societal advancement. As such, the debate surrounding the alphabet reform merits a nuanced examination, acknowledging the diverse factors that influence a nation's historical journey towards development and prominence in the international arena.

### **2.5. The Allegation of Incompatibility of the Arabic Alphabet with the Turkish Language and Voices**

Alphabets, as fundamental systems of written language, play a crucial role in facilitating communication through reading and writing. The letters within alphabets are designed to represent the sounds present in the spoken language, either individually or in combination with other phonetic elements. By using alphabets that accurately capture the sounds of their respective languages, societies can significantly ease the process of reading and writing. Hence, the presence of national alphabets or alphabets capable of accurately representing a language's phonetic structure holds paramount importance. The Kemalists' argument for legitimizing the alphabet reform lies in their assertion that the Arabic alphabet, then in use for Turkish, was incompatible with the Turkish language's phonetic structure. According to their claims, the Latin alphabet provided a more suitable and precise means of representing the sounds inherent to the Turkish language. This belief led them to advocate for the replacement of the Arabic script with the Latin script, underpinning their vision for modernization and development through linguistic reform (Nedim & Asaf, 1933, 34 - 35).

The Kemalist claim above regarding the Arabic alphabet leads to two distinct inferences, each addressing the perceived advantages of the Latin alphabet over the Arabic alphabet in accurately representing the sounds of the Turkish language. The

first inference contends that the Arabic alphabet's inherent limitations make it inadequate in capturing the diverse range of sounds, while the Latin alphabet excels in this regard. The second inference emphasizes the Latin alphabet's particular suitability in accommodating the Turkish language's unique phonetic structure compared to the Arabic alphabet. To validate these Kemalist claims, empirical evidence must indisputably support at least one of these inferences.

The first inference posits that the Arabic alphabet inadequately accommodates the diverse sounds and linguistic characteristics in general. For this claim to hold true, a significant portion of readers of that language would encounter challenges in accurately reading the text, experience difficulties in mastering reading and writing, or exhibit delayed literacy. However, upon examination, these challenges are not evident in languages such as Arabic, Persian, Pashto, or Urdu, which effectively utilize the Arabic script. Furthermore, if these difficulties were applicable to the Ottoman Turkish language, it would have impeded the Ottoman state from achieving superpower status and hindered advancements in various fields, ranging from art to literature.

In the context of the Kemalist claim regarding the inadequacy of the Arabic alphabet in meeting the linguistic needs, it becomes evident that the proponents of this view have not provided substantial empirical evidence or accurate examples to substantiate their argument. Just like a legal rule in the *Mecelle* requires proof for its generalizability, any claim put forth must be supported by credible evidence (Aydin, 2003). However, in this case, the alleged deficiencies of the Arabic alphabet have not been empirically demonstrated, and the reality of various languages such as Arabic, Persian, Pashto, and Urdu effectively using the Arabic script challenges the validity of the inference. The absence of concrete evidence supporting this claim raises doubts about its accuracy and warrants further scrutiny. To establish a well-grounded argument, a comparative analysis of different scripts' phonetic qualities and their impact on language acquisition and literacy rates would be necessary. Moreover, examining historical precedents of script reforms in various societies could shed light on the implications of such changes on cultural and societal development. Thus, without substantial empirical support and accurate examples, it can be confidently asserted that the inference regarding the inadequacy of the Arabic alphabet in meeting the linguistic needs is flawed.

The second inference pertains to the comparison between the Latin and Arabic alphabets, positing that the Latin script significantly surpasses the Arabic script in its suitability and advantage in accommodating the unique linguistic and phonetic structure of the Turkish language. While the first inference held a broader scope, encompassing general aspects, the second inference is a more focused rendition specifically centered on the Turkish language. Building upon the earlier discussions concerning the representation of sounds in both alphabets, it is crucial to delve into the underlying motives behind the alphabet reform rather than solely assessing the alphabets' efficacy in accommodating Turkish. Nevertheless, the success of both alphabets in meeting Turkish sounds will be compared briefly. Then, to illustrate this point, a historical example will be presented, showcasing how the adoption of the Latin script during the Kemalist alphabet reform in 1928 was not merely driven by phonetic considerations. Instead, the reform was driven by multifaceted objectives, including Türkiye's desire to align itself with Western civilizations, foster modernization, and project an image of progress and enlightenment. Consequently, the reform represented a deliberate shift in Türkiye's cultural and national identity, signifying the nation's embracement of Western values and norms, transcending the mere technicalities of script adaptation.

When a community adopts a non-national alphabet, it is essential that the voices of their language find appropriate representation through the use of letters or characters. In such cases, the adoption of regulations to accommodate specific sounds becomes a logical and practical approach (Lewis, 1999).

The Turkish society sought a solution in this regard by incorporating the Arabic alphabet, with certain terminological adjustments and additions unique to Turkish phonetics. For instance, the sound "PE" in Turkish was addressed by introducing a symbol not found in the original Arabic alphabet but present in the Turkish version for centuries (Canbolat, 1991: 49 – 55).

Conversely, the Turkish variant of the Latin alphabet does not adequately cover various Turkish sounds. An illustrative example can be found in words like "hala" (aunt) and "hala" (even), which are written the same way using Latin letters but pronounced differently. While occasional terminological signs are used on Latin letters

to aid correct pronunciation, it is not a widespread practice, leading individuals to derive pronunciation from the context. This discrepancy is often highlighted by Kemalists to criticize the Arabic alphabet and justify the adoption of the Latin alphabet.

However, a closer examination reveals that the Arabic alphabet is not significantly behind the Latin alphabet in accommodating Turkish sounds. For instance, the Arabic alphabet used by the Turks includes two distinct letters, ق and ك, to represent different sounds, whereas the Latin alphabet uses only one letter (K) for both sounds. Consequently, many words are not pronounced as written in the Latin alphabet, contrary to claims made in favor of its superiority.

Indeed, it is essential to consider the historical context and reasoning behind the alphabet reform in the early Turkish Republic. Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, a member of the alphabet change commission, offers valuable insights into the decision-making process in his memoirs titled "45 Years in Politics." He recounts an incident where differences of opinion among commission members on letter choices were resolved by the firm directive of Mustafa Kemal, the prominent leader of Türkiye. For instance, the Arabic letters ق and ك, which represent distinct phonetic sounds, prompted discussions about their replacement in the new Latin-based alphabet. The proposal was to adopt the Latin letter "K" in place of ك and the letter "Q" for ق. However, Mustafa Kemal's decisive intervention led to the elimination of both Arabic letters, with him expressing his disapproval, stating, "I do not want to see these letters, do whatever you do quickly." (Karaosmanoğlu, 2016)

Consequently, the Arabic letters ق and ك were both replaced by the letter "K" in the new Turkish-style Latin alphabet, and the letter "Q" was omitted entirely. This decision had ramifications for Turkish pronunciation, as the absence of the letter "Q" resulted in various pronunciation challenges. Additionally, the Latin alphabet failed to accurately represent three phonetic distinctions present in the original Arabic alphabet used by Turks: ه, ح, and خ, which were compressed into a single letter "H." While most languages globally adhere to a one-to-one correspondence between spoken sounds and written letters, Turkish stands out as a unique exception with its faithfulness to this principle.

However, the alphabet reform did not fully capture certain phonetic nuances in Turkish, potentially leading to a loss of these distinctions in spoken language over time. Maintaining linguistic integrity is crucial for preserving cultural heritage and national identity. To assess the implications of the reform, further research should consider the broader socio-cultural context and consult linguistic experts. Comparative analyses with other languages that have undergone similar alphabet reforms may offer valuable insights into strategies for safeguarding linguistic heritage and ensuring the continued relevance of Turkish as an expressive language. In conclusion, Yakup Kadri's recollections provide valuable insights into the motivations behind the alphabet reform and the role of Mustafa Kemal in shaping the new Turkish-style Latin alphabet.

In concluding the examination of the Kemalist claims regarding the compatibility of the Arabic alphabet with the Turkish language and sound structure, it becomes evident that neither of the inferences made can be substantiated by empirical evidence. Upon careful analysis of historical examples and the proficiency of both alphabets in representing Turkish sounds, instances in favor of the Arabic alphabet's capabilities can be readily found. Nevertheless, in the broader context of alphabet reforms, it is indeed practical and logical for a nation to adopt an alphabet that aligns closely with the sound and linguistic specifications of its language. If any deficiencies arise in meeting these criteria within either alphabet, it is possible to address them through appropriate modifications without necessitating an entire alphabet change.

The case of the Turkish alphabet reform, as exemplified by the concrete example from Yakup Kadri's memoirs, demonstrates that the underlying motivation was not solely to enhance the representation of the Turkish language and its nuances (Karaosmanoğlu, 2016). Instead, the reform appears to have been driven by other objectives unrelated to linguistic functionality, seeking to rectify certain stigmatized features that visually represent Islamic elements. Consequently, it is essential to discern between the actual shortcomings of an alphabet and the motivations behind an alphabet reform, as they may not always be intrinsically related.

As a result, modern Turkish orthography, utilizing the Latin-based alphabet, coexists with the legacy of the Arabic script. Both alphabets possess their distinct advantages and limitations when representing Turkish sounds and language features. Such

variations are not uncommon, and adjusting either alphabet to address specific deficiencies can be a viable solution, rather than undertaking a complete alphabet change. Understanding the historical context and motivations behind alphabet reforms is vital in preserving linguistic integrity and appreciating the dynamic interactions between language, culture, and society.

In summary, it is evident that the claims made regarding the Arabic alphabet's inadequacy in meeting Turkish language and sound structures remain unsubstantiated. Both alphabets have their merits and could be adapted to overcome any limitations if necessary. The Turkish alphabet reform, as illustrated by the specific instance from Yakup Kadri's memoirs, reveals that its primary purpose extended beyond merely improving the representation of the Turkish language and its intricacies; rather, the reform seems to have been primarily motivated by addressing stigmatized visual representations of Islamic elements.

## **2.6. The Claim on Arabic Alphabet: Causing Literacy Difficulties**

The issue of the Turkish alphabet reform has remained a topic of discussion and legitimacy among Kemalists, who assert that one of the prominent obstacles to its acceptance lies in the difficulty and inconsistency of reading and writing Turkish using the Arabic alphabet. This contention, which suggests that the Arabic script's complexity hampers literacy rates among the population, has persisted in contemporary discourse surrounding the reform.

The adoption and acceptance of the Latin alphabet in the Turkish alphabet reform was purportedly motivated by the belief that it would facilitate quicker and easier literacy acquisition among the population. This rationale served as a key aspect of the reform's justification. With the introduction of the new alphabet, the ambitious objective emerged of achieving widespread literacy among almost the entire populace within a short period. To accomplish this goal, the establishment of "millet mektepleri" was undertaken, envisaging universal literacy, including among the elderly, women, and children residing in rural areas, by harnessing the full resources of the state. The reformists envisioned the Latin alphabet as an instrumental tool to expedite the

national endeavor of achieving widespread literacy and elevate the educational standards across all segments of society (Cemal, 2013: 43-47).

The proponents of the Latin alphabet in the context of the Turkish literacy rate hold a favorable view, contending that the acceptance of the Latin alphabet might facilitate to an increase in literacy levels. Consequently, the Arabic alphabet has been put forth as a purported reason for the low literacy rate, as exemplified in the literature affiliated with Kemalism. This perspective has given rise to certain assertions concerning the characteristics of the Arabic script. Notably, it is argued that the Arabic alphabet exhibits variations in the shape of its letters at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of a words, leading to potential confusion for the reader. These claims suggest that such inherent complexities in the Arabic alphabet may act as barriers to effective and efficient literacy acquisition and utilization, thereby warranting the implementation of a more straightforward and uniform writing system like the Latin alphabet (Kayıran & Metintaş, 2009).

The subject of hurûf-ı munfasıla, hatt-ı cedîd, and Enver writing emerged as a topic of discussion in the last periods of the empire. Enver Pasha, in particular, developed and attempted to implement this system to facilitate communication within the army. Under this system, letters were presented in their final forms without being connected to each other, and vowels were also incorporated into the writing. However, the adoption of this writing system was met with limited success within the army, and its application failed to achieve widespread usage, leading to its eventual abandonment before reaching a national scale. Despite its shortcomings, the existence of such an agenda in Ottoman society is of significance, shedding light on the attempts made to explore alternative writing systems during that era (Hakkı: 435 – 436).

The Arabic alphabet primarily comprises consonants, and the representation of vowel sounds is accomplished through the use of diacritical marks known as Arabic diacritics (حركات), positioned above or below the consonant letters. Kemalists have employed this characteristic as a focal point of criticism to validate the alphabet reform, contending that it engenders difficulties in both reading and writing. As each letter can be pronounced with three different diacritics, the main premise posited by the Kemalists is that the absence of diacritical marks may lead to various interpretations

of a word, resulting in potential discrepancies in pronunciation. This aspect is deemed problematic and forms a central argument in favor of reforming the alphabet.

Taking into account the aforementioned claim, it becomes evident that certain countries employing the Latin alphabet do not explicitly designate vowels in their languages; although they endeavor to establish boundaries through specific rules, exceptions to these rules exist, and with increased exposure to the language, this issue becomes less problematic for individuals. The English language exemplifies this phenomenon precisely. In English, there is no fixed vowel representation for the various sounds present in the language. For instance, when considering the pronunciation of the letter "a," it is pronounced differently in the words "back," "all," and "private." This illustrates the variability in vowel sounds, and despite the lack of specific vowel markings, English speakers adapt to these nuances as they become more familiar with the language.

Despite both languages utilizing the same alphabet, Turkish exhibits a relatively more precise set of rules for attributing specific vowel symbols to represent each sound within its language structure, compared to English. The same principle applies to the Arabic alphabet. Throughout its thousand-year-old civilization, the Arabic alphabet has demonstrated success in various fields, and any claims suggesting that this alphabet has hindered societal progress necessitate empirical evidence for validation. However, the Kemalist assertions lack a solid empirical foundation. Undoubtedly, modifications in the alphabet can be implemented to enhance reading and writing efficiency. It is reasonable to improve the effective use of the alphabet by introducing adjustments, such as incorporating the letter "PE" (پ) into the Arabic alphabet previously utilized during the Ottoman era. Nonetheless, altering the alphabet based on claims lacking empirical support, without clearly identifying the problem and devising efforts to address it, appears to serve purposes beyond the mere facilitation of reading and writing. Such changes may be intended to legitimize alternative agendas rather than promoting the intended ease of communication.

In evaluating the assertions of the Kemalists, it proves pertinent to examine the literacy rates as a significant factor. Official statistics from 1927 indicate that the literacy rate was recorded as 8.1 percent of the population. However, Ekinci contends that this

figure may not fully reflect the reality, raising questions about whether this ratio encompasses individuals acquainted with the Latin alphabet at that time. This perspective stems from the 1903 "Maarif Salnamesi" (Education Yearbook), which reported that out of the 19.9 million population, approximately 1.3 million were students, with over 850 thousand being elementary school students, amounting to 5 percent of the population. This estimation does not account for students studying in secondary, high school, higher education, informal schools, or those pursuing private lessons, including hundreds of thousands of officers. Moreover, Ekinci posits that the literacy rate would have been higher if calculations were based on the lands within the borders of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923, rather than those in 1903. With just over 12.5 million inhabitants within Türkiye's borders in 1923, approximately 981,442 were primary school students, representing 8% of the population. Thus, Ekinci asserts that the literacy rate reported by the republican regime merely reflects primary school students' numbers. He further argues that employing the general principles of statistical science, the literacy rate could have reached at least 50 percent if half of the remaining population had attended primary school throughout their lives, and 30 percent if the remaining quarter of the population had done so (Ekinci, 2013), (TÜİK, 2021).

In his book *Ottoman Population 1830 - 1914*, Kemal Karpat posited that the literacy rate in the empire during the Abdulhamid period, specifically between 1894 - 1895, stood at 54% based on the data of that period (Karpat, 2003: 449). However, this statistic contradicts the data presented by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), creating a discrepancy between the two sources. Such contradictions in historical data can be expected, as ideological differences between successive regimes often lead to attempts to discredit the features of previous administrations, thereby establishing their own legitimacy. If TUIK's statistics are considered accurate, it becomes apparent that despite the adoption of the Latin alphabet a decade earlier, the literacy rate remained relatively low, with only 19.6% of the population being literate in 1938. According to TUIK data, the ratio of literacy to population was 15% in 1935; 32% in 1960; In 1970, it was 46%, well below expectations. In Ekinci's words, these statistics show that the Latin alphabet is insufficient to increase the literacy rate despite all the campaigns and government incentives. Despite extensive state efforts, including the establishment of institutions, literacy courses, and a national mobilization, the acceptance of the Latin

alphabet fell considerably short of Kemalist claims, failing to achieve the goal of widespread literacy across society.

On the other hand, according to data from the Türkiye Statistical Institute, the literacy rate was approximately 12% under the Arabic alphabet in 1923 (Tongul, 2004). If the rate continued to increase at a normal pace, one could have expected a literacy rate of around 22% by 1938. However, the reality differed significantly, raising questions about the effectiveness of the literacy campaign and the challenges involved in the transition to the Latin alphabet.

Upon thorough examination and contemplation of the preceding discussions, it becomes evident that the contrasting literacy rate statistics between Kemal Karpat and the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) raise some doubts, which can be attributed to the ideological differences between successive regimes. Such attempts to discredit the characteristics of previous administrations and establish legitimacy for new regimes often lead to contradictions in historical data. Nevertheless, even if we accept TUIK's data as accurate, the rate of increase in literacy remained disappointingly below expectations, despite the prolonged adoption and acceptance of the Latin alphabet and the extensive utilization of state resources. This discrepancy suggests that the low Turkish literacy rate cannot be attributed to the nature of the Arabic alphabet, as claimed by the Kemalists.

The ambitious efforts to adopt the Latin alphabet, coupled with the difficulty encountered in achieving widespread literacy in Turkish society, necessitate a deeper investigation into the conditions and social structure of the period. However, attributing the low literacy rate to the nature of an alphabet without empirical data and a comparative analysis is devoid of scientific value. Both the Arabic and Latin alphabets are utilized by Turks for various purposes. Children learn to read and write with the Latin alphabet in primary school, while the Arabic alphabet is being used to learn Ottoman Turkish, an elective course at different education levels, and to read the Qur'an. There is no inherent difficulty associated with either alphabet.

Contrary to Kemalist claims, the inadequacy of the Arabic alphabet for literacy was not the true reason for the alphabet reform. The motive was primarily ideological. Even

a significant majority of the Kemalist cadre, the architects of the reform, continued to write in Turkish with the Arabic alphabet until their passing after the revolution. Once a language is learned with a specific alphabet, it becomes exceedingly challenging to abandon it. This paradoxical stance of the Kemalist cadre sheds light on the true purpose behind the reform.

Ismet Inonu, one of Mustafa Kemal's closest associates, who served with the title of the first Prime Minister and later as the second President of the Republic of Türkiye, candidly articulates the true intentions behind the alphabet reform in his autobiography. *“The Alphabet Reform cannot be attributed to the ease of reading and writing. (...) The influence and great benefit of the Alphabet Reform for us is that it facilitates the change of culture.”* (Inonu, 1987, 223) Evidently, the reforms were not pursued out of practical necessity but rather driven by resolute ideological motivations. Their objective was to sever ties with the nation's historical past, effectively molding the emerging state, and exerting control over its populace. Remarkably, the age-old alphabet of the nation underwent radical transformation without affording the opportunity for the nation's collective will to be considered in the process.

In conclusion, the discrepancies in literacy rate statistics and the difficulty in achieving widespread literacy during the transition to the Latin alphabet underscore the need for further research into the socio-political context of the period. Dismissing the Arabic alphabet as inherently inadequate for literacy without empirical evidence overlooks the multi-faceted factors contributing to historical developments. The reform's true motive appears to be rooted in ideological considerations, rather than any inherent limitation of the Arabic alphabet.

## **2.7. The Arabic Alphabet Debates: Printing Costs and Language Barriers for Foreigners**

This section of the dissertation explores two arguments presented by the Kemalists in their efforts to legitimize the alphabet reform. The first argument centers around the claim that the Arabic alphabet, as the writing system for Turkish, leads to higher printing costs. This stems from the dominance of the Latin alphabet in the rapidly developing printing sector. By adopting the Latin alphabet, Türkiye aims to reduce

printing expenses, which is expected to positively impact its economy. The second argument is based on the perceived difficulty for foreigners to learn Turkish as a second language when using the Arabic alphabet. Additionally, proponents of the reform assert that the Arabic script hinders the recognition of Turkish culture by foreigners (Nedim & Asaf, 1933, 34 - 35).

The first argument put forward by the Kemalists to justify the alphabet reform revolves around the economic considerations of the printing sector. They asserted that the Arabic alphabet, as the traditional writing system of Turkish, posed significant challenges in the rapidly developing printing industry, where the dominant standard was the Latin alphabet. This situation inevitably led to increased printing costs for materials written in the Arabic script. By adopting the Latin alphabet, Türkiye could align itself with the international norm for printing, thereby reducing costs and facilitating easier access to modern printing technologies. Consequently, the switch to the Latin alphabet was seen as a strategic move to enhance economic efficiency and bring Türkiye closer to global markets.

In the pursuit of justifying the alphabet reform, one of the arguments presented by the Kemalists focuses on economic concerns within the printing industry. However, this rationale fails to reflect the true intention behind the reform. To what extent can economic factors persuade a society to abandon an alphabet it has employed for millennia? Considering that the Arabic alphabet has long been the traditional writing system for the Turkish language, the claim that it creates significant economic difficulties in the printing sector is an insufficient explanation for a society with a rich history and civilization. A robust and self-confident society and state are not expected to readily change their alphabet under such circumstances; instead, they would concentrate on technological advancements within the printing industry, adapting the technology to their own norms and standards.

Moreover, decisions like the alphabet reform serve as litmus tests, revealing the nature of a society's identity. The decision to alter an alphabet used for centuries, allegedly due to economic concerns, without even relying on empirical data, can be seen as an attempt to obscure the effort to address the stigmatized identity attributed to Islamic elements. Furthermore, the Kemalist arguments regarding reduced printing costs

through the adoption of the popular alphabet of the time are logically flawed. While this change may potentially save on printing expenses, the process incurs additional costs. In practice, during the alphabet reform, all works written in the Arabic script were shelved and prohibited from use, necessitating their substitution with materials written in the Latin script. This transition inevitably leads to additional expenses, effectively counteracting the purported economic benefits.

Therefore, it would not be counter-intuitive to say that the reform ultimately resulted in an increase in printing costs, challenging the claimed economic rationale behind the decision. Such inconsistencies and practical implications cast doubts on the economic justifications for the alphabet reform and reinforce the argument that the underlying motives were rooted in identity concerns and attempts to reshape Türkiye's national image.

Pertaining to the initial contention, the following observations and assessments can be proffered. The economic argument presented by the Kemalists to support the alphabet reform lacks substantial basis when scrutinized in the context of Türkiye's historical legacy and societal identity. The decision to abandon the traditional Arabic script in favor of the Latin alphabet carries broader implications beyond mere economic considerations. By examining the practical implementation of the reform and its impact on printing costs, it becomes evident that the reform's rationale was influenced by deeper identity issues, further emphasizing the complexities of historical and societal transformations during this period.

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The second argument put forth by the Kemalists in favor of the alphabet reform revolves around the ease of learning Turkish as a foreign language and the promotion of Turkish culture on a global scale. However, this argument, similar to the one discussed earlier, reflects the tendency of justifying the reform through the lens of Western perceptions. In decision-making processes, when the focus is not on one's own self, the superiority of another is often accepted. Ayşe Zarakol's work, "After Defeat," aptly highlights this perspective, asserting that Türkiye, from its inception, has predominantly viewed its actions and reforms through the lens of Europe's potential reactions, rather than embracing its authentic identity (Zarakol, 2010: 42-45).

In contrast to the aforementioned contentions, this particular argument exhibits a more explicit explication of its intent, rather than attributing inherent deficiencies to the Arabic script. It indicates an inclination towards becoming European, as reflected in the reforms and foreign policy pursued by Türkiye. Aligning with European norms

and standards, and aspiring to be part of the community of European states, has been a driving force behind Türkiye's decision to embrace the Latin alphabet. The widespread usage of the Latin script in the targeted European societies facilitates language learning and fosters closer relations, an advantage in Türkiye's quest for European integration.

Moreover, abandoning the Arabic alphabet serves the purpose of distancing Türkiye from visible symbols of Islam, aligning with the Western image it seeks to project. The adoption of the Latin alphabet, therefore, becomes an element in constructing a specific perception of Türkiye within the international community.

This occurrence stands as a noteworthy anomaly in historical contexts, where a society and state, deeply vested in their civilizational ambitions and fortified by an enduring cultural and historical legacy, made the exceptional decision to embrace the Latin alphabet with the apparent intention of facilitating European comprehension of their language and culture. This shift indicates an acceptance of the West's triumph following the defeat, with the Kemalist regime internalizing Western norms and standards while attempting to rectify any visible elements that were accepted as stigmatized (Zarakol, 2010: 22 - 23).

In conclusion, the second argument presented by the Kemalists, emphasizing the ease of learning Turkish as a foreign language and promoting Turkish culture globally, aligns with the desire to become part of the European community and project a specific image to the West. This decision, however, raises questions about Türkiye's authentic identity and the degree to which it has internalized Western norms and standards. The historical backdrop underscores the acceptance of Western influence by the Kemalist regime, leading to a concerted effort to realign visible symbols, such as the alphabet, with Western ideals.

## CHAPTER III

### ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF THE REFORM: AN OVERVIEW OF LANGUAGE POLICIES

The language policies of Türkiye play a crucial role in understanding the motivation behind the alphabet reform, making it imperative to examine these policies closely. This thesis aims to explore two distinct and intriguing language policies, along with a prominent language theory pursued by Türkiye. The first policy, known as liquidationism, advocates for the elimination of all foreign words that have entered Turkish through religious influences. The second one, the simplification policy, aims to reduce the differences between the languages used by the population, which includes the whole, and the languages used by the intellectual elites. Last but not least, this thesis will examine the Sun Language Theory, which claims that all languages are born from Turkish and argues that the first human being was Turkish. Through an analysis of these language policies and the language theory, this study endeavors to shed light on their significance in shaping Türkiye's linguistic landscape and the trigger behind the alphabet reform.

#### **3.1. Liquidation of Words Entered into Turkish Through Religion**

As the nomenclature suggests, the first language policy aimed to eradicate all foreign words that had entered Turkish through religious channels. To this end, a committee was established to identify the words to be eliminated from the language and propose suitable replacements. The committee aspired to create new words based on pure Turkish sources to substitute the ones with Arabic or Persian origins. However, in practice, the committee ended up incorporating certain foreign words into the language instead of solely relying on native Turkish terms. This policy, known as liquidationism, reveals the intricate challenges faced in purging religiously influenced vocabulary from the Turkish language while simultaneously navigating the

complexities of linguistic adaptation and preservation (Unan, 1990: 33-42), (Lewis, 1999: 44 - 63).

The implementation of this policy gives rise to certain inconsistencies and a dilemma. While Turkish has borrowed numerous words from various foreign languages, ranging from Greek to French, the language reform delegation primarily focused on creating replacements for Arabic and Persian words. As elucidated in the sections of this thesis concerning the alphabet reform, this selective approach aimed at severing ties with the linguistic past, akin to the goals pursued in the alphabet reform. Language, by its very nature, exhibits a highly dynamic character. Words become part of a society when they are naturally accepted and integrated over time, rather than being artificially created on behalf of that society. Consequently, some words may be forgotten, while others may transform into slang or adopt different forms. Through interactions, foreign words find their way into the language, wherein they can undergo transformations and eventually become ingrained in the lexicon of the society. As such, labeling these words as entirely foreign would be misguided. Turkish, which developed within an empire for centuries, naturally contains a significant number of words of Arabic origin. It would be exceedingly challenging for a person to speak Turkish without employing words of Arabic descent (Asım, 1999), (Lewis, 1999: 111 - 139).

Despite the proclaimed objective of adhering to "pure Turkish" in language, this language policy has led Türkiye to diverge from other Turkish-speaking states, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. As mentioned earlier, the language reform committee generated newly fabricated words based on pure Turkish sources, yet these neologisms found no usage within any Turkish-speaking community worldwide. For instance, while all the aforementioned Turkish-speaking countries refer to a school as "mektep" (a word of Arabic origin), the committee introduced the word "okul," inspired by the French term *école*, to denote the educational institution. This exemplifies a discrepancy in vocabulary choices and illustrates how the language policy's attempts to establish a distinct linguistic identity have resulted in divergence from the linguistic practices of other Turkish-speaking nations. Another noteworthy example is the use of the word for "honor." Whereas all Turkish-speaking countries employ the term "şeref" to express this concept, the language reform committee opted

for the word "onur," derived from the English term "honor," deviating from the shared linguistic heritage among Turkish-speaking communities (Lewis, 1999).

The process of word creation undertaken by the committee exhibits intriguing and undemocratic aspects. In his renowned book titled "Zeytindağı," the writer Falih Rıfkı Atay, who was a member of the committee, recounts a revealing incident on this matter. The committee faced difficulty in devising a new word to replace "ticaret" (trade), a term that had been ingrained in the Turkish language for centuries. Seeking to pass the time, Atay found himself doodling Arabic letters ت and ج on a piece of paper before him. In Turkish, these letters are pronounced as "te" and "cim," respectively. When Mustafa Kemal inquired about his activity, Atay casually mentioned that he had written the letters ت and ج. Surprisingly, in response, Mustafa Kemal ordered the word "tecim" to be adopted instead of "ticaret." This anecdote illustrates the extent of the committee's influence and the decision-making process, whereby a single individual's spontaneous response paved the way for the adoption of a new word within the Turkish language (Atay, 1932).

In 1934, the publication of the book titled "Pure Turkish Equivalents: They Will Replace the Ones Used in Ottoman Turkish" marked a significant milestone in the language reform efforts of the time. This comprehensive work contained a multitude of newly crafted words intended to supplant those of Arabic origin in the Turkish language. Notably, the term/name "Allah," designating the concept of God, serves as a pertinent example. Having entered Turkish through the acceptance of Islam by the Turkic societies, "Allah" has been a prominent and deeply ingrained term within the Turkish lexicon for centuries, dating back to the early periods. However, in the book, despite its enduring usage by the Turkish public, no less than 19 alternative words have been created to replace "Allah" solely due to its Arabic origin. This exemplifies the concerted effort to replace Arabic and Persian words while leaving untouched those of other origins. This linguistic policy, akin to the underlying objective of the alphabet reform, reflects the broader intention to distance Türkiye from its Ottoman past and forge a distinctly Turkish national identity. The systematic substitution of Arabic and Persian-origin words seeks to align the Turkish language with a newly envisioned national framework, in line with the principles of Kemalist ideology. This approach not only embodies the desire for linguistic purification, but also reveals the effort to

correct the stigmatized elements in the identity of the Republic of Türkiye, which is on the way to Westernization, by removing the words related to Islam from Turkish language (Vakit, 1934).

The language reform of the early Turkish Republic witnessed the creation of tens of thousands of words intended to replace those of Arabic and Persian origin. Although many of these neologisms have faded into disuse over time, the influx of newly coined words into today's Turkish language remains substantial. The government of the era diligently promoted these new words with all its influence, attempting to instill them into the fabric of society. However, such intervention in language can be regarded as a delicate matter, fraught with potential consequences for both the language and culture it seeks to shape. This approach amounts to a form of social engineering, which raises ethical concerns about disregarding the will of the people and the natural evolution of language. The endeavor, conducted by a committee, to determine which words the populace would use, runs the risk of imposing artificial constructs upon a language that has organically evolved over centuries. Contrary to claims of linguistic nationalism, the reform emerges as an overtly ideological undertaking, displaying a stark departure from linguistic naturalism and organic development (Lewis, 1999: 120 - 135).

In the subsequent stages of the language policy, the effort to almost complete banishment of Arabic words from Turkish led to a linguistic situation where the language became unfamiliar and incomprehensible to the general public. Falih Rıfki Atay's memoirs recount an illustrative incident where the interior minister of the period, Şükrü Kaya, delivered a speech composed entirely of the newly created words. Despite the attentive listening of the audience, the speech remained unintelligible to everyone. Confronted with this perplexing outcome, Falih Rıfki Atay approached Atatürk after the meeting and candidly expressed his inability to comprehend the speech. In response, Atatürk himself acknowledged the fallibility of his language policy, recognizing its adverse impact on communication. (Atay, 1999, 452) Consequently, the policy underwent a relative replacement, marking a shift in its direction.

### 3.2. Simplification in the Language

As elucidated earlier, the implementation of the new language policy, recognized as the simplification movement, gained momentum once it became evident that the complete removal of Arabic words from the language resulted in an impairment of the Turkish speaker's ability to effectively express themselves. The realization of this limitation prompted a shift in the language policy, with an emphasis on simplifying the language rather than outright exclusion. This nuanced approach aimed to contribute to a balance between encouraging the use of Turkish and preserving its basic communication capacity. Historical accounts attribute Atatürk's general ideas and understanding of this language policy to the Journal of Genç Kalemler, a literary journal published in the 1910s (Özyurt, 2005: 53 – 59).

In the pages of the magazine mentioned earlier, prominent writers articulated their ideas on language. Their discourse called for the removal of surplus words of Persian and Arabic origin from the Turkish language while advocating the preservation of foreign-derived words widely known and assimilated by the public. This policy demonstrated a rational approach to language assimilation, recognizing the significance of Arabic vocabulary for effective communication and acknowledging that omitting such well-integrated words would impede meaningful expression. An illustrative example of this perspective can be found in Mustafa Kemal's directive to Ahmet Cevat Emre, tasking him with preparing a list of Arabic words derived from the root ب-ت-ك. Upon careful examination of this list, Kemal Atatürk instructed the committee to retain the words commonly used by the Turkish people in the Turkish language. Beyond preserving vital linguistic elements, another objective of this language policy was the simplification of the language, intended to bridge the linguistic gap between different social classes within society. By taking measures to streamline the language, the aim was to foster greater cohesion and understanding between the general public and the intellectuals, thereby nurturing a harmonized Turkish society. This policy aims to unite different elements under a common linguistic identity. It is also aligned with broader nation-building efforts that promote a sense of harmony and belonging towards the nation. In fact, the Republic of Türkiye has realized a single official language French type nation-state structure by supporting these and similar policies (Pulat, 2017), (Belge, 2010: 27 – 37).

This language policy of Atatürk appears to be a cogent and well-considered approach, but it warrants a bifurcated analysis for a more nuanced evaluation. The initial aspect of the policy, aimed at safeguarding the language from an excessive influx of foreign words, aligns with the tenets of nationalism and refrains from artificial interventions in the language's natural development. However, the latter part of the policy, focusing on language simplification, does entail a certain level of intervention. Across languages, there exists a discrepancy in vocabulary between intellectuals and the general populace. Intellectuals draw upon a vast array of words, numbering in the tens of thousands, to convey intricate meanings, whereas ordinary individuals can proficiently navigate their daily affairs with a limited vocabulary of around 200 words. The abundance of words in a language serves as a measure of its richness. Simplification, though pursued with the intention of narrowing the linguistic disparity between the intellectuals and the masses, necessitates a careful balance between comprehensibility and preserving the language's depth and richness. Artificially constraining the language for the sake of simplification poses the risk of curtailing its expressive potential and cultural richness. Therefore, a judicious assessment of this aspect of the language policy is essential to gauge its implications accurately (Özdemir & Süğümlü, 2013).

The extensive removal of thousands of words from the Turkish language, aiming to bridge the gap between the language used by intellectuals and ordinary citizens, has resulted in structural deficiencies, rendering the language less capable of precisely expressing emotions and ideas. Presently, an average Turkish speaker tends to convey their emotional state using only a handful of words, such as "üzgün" (sad) or "stresli" (stressed). In contrast, the Ottoman Turkish language encompassed a rich tapestry of words like "gam", "hasret", "keder", "efkar", "melal", "inkisar", "ızdırıp", "hüzün", "kahır", "yeis", "dert", "elem", and "tasa", each bearing subtle nuances of the emotional spectrum. A comparison with English illuminates the issue further, wherein words like "deliberation," "discussion," "negotiation," "debate," and "consultation" each convey distinct meanings. In contrast, today's the current Turkish equivalent "Tartışma" encompasses these various meanings, indicative of the linguistic repercussions stemming from the simplification policy. This policy's adverse impact becomes evident, especially when considering that most of the words removed under this simplification movement have religious origins, aligning with the objectives of

fostering a secular Western nation by attenuating historical ties. Consequently, the policy has had a profound influence on the linguistic landscape, diminishing its expressive potential and cultural depth.

### **3.3. Sun Language Theory**

The language theory advocated by Mustafa Kemal between 1935 and 1940, known as the Sun Language Theory, traces its origins to H. F. Kvergić from Hungary, who is considered the founder of this theory. The core proposition of this theory revolves around the assertion that the first person on Earth was of Turkic origin, and consequently, Turkish represents the first language and serves as the progenitor of all other languages. In a meeting arranged by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, Kvergić elucidated his theory to Atatürk, who subsequently lent his support to it. Mustafa Kemal employed this theory as a means to safeguard against the drastic removal of foreign words from modern Turkish. By assuming that all words were inherently Turkish, the need for their removal could be obviated, aligning with the regime's objectives and facilitating ease of communication for the people. According to the Sun Language Theory, all foreign words present in the Turkish language are essentially Turkish, as Turkish itself is posited as the primordial source from which all other languages emanate (Aytürk, 2009: 23 – 44), (Demir, 2010: 385-396).

Supported theory by Mustafa Kemal, several commissions were established to validate its accuracy. A significant manifestation of this support was the publication of the book titled "Language Studies According to the Sun Language Theory" (Güneş Dil Teorisine Göre Dil Tetkikleri), which served as a designated textbook within Türkiye's language, history, and geography faculties for a duration of five years. The primary aim of this book was to present empirical evidence and illustrative examples supporting the Sun Language Theory's contentions regarding the derivation of foreign words from Turkish. Nevertheless, upon careful scrutiny, certain instances within these informal studies may reveal inherent inconsistencies and logical fallacies, potentially casting doubts on the plausibility of the theory (Tankut, 1936).

In this study, an example is presented to support the claim that the English word "okay" is derived from Turkish. According to the hypothesis, the traditional weapon of ancient

Turks was the arrow, and archery held ancestral significance in their culture. The Turkish word for "arrow" is "ok," and the word for "moon" is "ay." It is suggested that the act of Turks shooting arrows at the moon during the night, expressing their joy upon successful hits, led to the combination of "ok" and "ay" as a form of celebration. Consequently, the English term "okay" is believed to have originated from this Turkish expression. (Tankut, 1936)

Another example is put forth to propose a potential Turkish origin for the English word "academy." The word "ak" in Turkish signifies "white" and serves as an adjective denoting "wisdom" in the language. When combined with the term "Adam," which translates to "man" in Turkish, the resulting phrase is "ak adam," meaning "wise man." It is postulated that the term "Academy" might have derived from this Turkish expression. (Tankut, 1936)

A third illustrative instance is introduced, proposing a potential Turkish origin for the term "amazon." According to the hypothesis, when ancient Turks encountered the vast length of the Amazon River during their voyages to the American continent, they expressed their astonishment by uttering the phrase "Amma da uzun," which directly translates to "such a long" in English. It is contended that the term "Amazon" may have derived from this Turkish expression. (Tankut, 1936)

Fourth example is presented, proposing a potential Turkish origin for the term "Niagara." The hypothesis posits that the ancient Turks, upon encountering the awe-inspiring sound of the Niagara waterfall in the American continent, expressed their amazement using the phrase "Ne yaygara," signifying "what a fuss" in English. Consequently, it is argued that the term "Niagara" may have evolved from this Turkish expression. (Tankut, 1936)

During the Turcology Congress held in Ankara in 1940, Western scholars critically examined and subsequently refuted the Sun Language Theory, which posited that Turkish served as the mother of all languages. The theory had claimed considerable attention but faced vehement opposition and scholarly disapproval. Turkish researchers present at the congress elucidated this situation to the then-president, İsmet İnönü, who subsequently withdrew support for the theory. Consequently, the

influential book titled "Language Studies According to the Sun Language Theory" (Güneş Dil Teorisine Göre Dil Tetkikleri), which had been utilized as a textbook in language, history, and geography faculties of universities in Türkiye, was no longer endorsed for academic instruction as of 1940. This decisive shift signaled the theory's dismissal from the government's agenda, marking the conclusion of its role as a central language policy.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

As explained in the Chapter, both language policies targeted foreign words that entered Turkish through religion. In fact, the commission did not refrain from using foreign words and foreign suffixes when determining new words to replace these words (Lewis, 1999: 159). The Sun Language Theory is also important as it reflects the history thesis of Kemalist ideology. While associating Turkishness with Europe in some way serves the goal of westernization that the republic turned towards, it also contains the aim of erasing ties with the past. Both language policies and language theory, as an integral part of the alphabet reform, aimed to weaken and, if possible, cut the ties of Turks with Islam and their past.

## CHAPTER IV

### REFLECTION OF STIGMA: ACTIVE ISOLATION IN FOREIGN POLICY

#### 4.1. The Presence of Stigma and Its Reflections on the Origin of Foreign Policy

This thesis asserts that the stigmatized identity of Türkiye, along with the changes and interactions within the international system, served as the primary catalysts for the alphabet reform. The impact of this phenomenon extended beyond the scope of the reform itself, permeating various aspects of both domestic and foreign politics within the Republic of Türkiye. The preceding chapters have delved into the historical formation of the international system, the process of constructing the Turkish nation-state and its identity, as well as the intricate dynamics surrounding the alphabet reform. In this chapter, the focus shifts towards an examination of foreign policy of Türkiye and the Sevr syndrome, aiming to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the issues discussed in the preceding sections within the broader context of Türkiye. Throughout this chapter, frequent references will be made to the theoretical frameworks employed by this thesis, serving as a guiding framework for the analysis. By exploring the interplay between foreign and domestic politics, it becomes evident that the themes and arguments put forth in the earlier sections are intertwined and manifest in the multifaceted realities of Türkiye. The ensuing discussion aims to shed light on the intricate connections between Türkiye's foreign policy, the Sevres syndrome, and their collective influence on domestic and international affairs (Davutoğlu, 2012).

The Turkish nation has endured a relentless struggle since the 18th century, culminating in the establishment of the Republic and the attainment of external security through the Treaty of Lausanne. Mustafa Kemal, the Republic's founder, emerged from the crucible of Ottoman military service, personally witnessing the ordeals of occupations, wars, the national struggle, uprisings, diplomacy, as well as the haunting memories and traumas associated with the Treaty of Sèvres. During the

18th and 19th centuries, the structure of the Ottoman Empire became stigmatized within the nascent international system. Although there were revolts by the Ottomans against this structure, the Ottoman political elites and the founding cadres of the republic did not strongly contest the norms and standards of Western civilization. However, in the 20th century, a shift occurred whereby the superiority of the Western system was gradually acknowledged, and Western civilization was embraced as an aspirational goal and a community to be integrated into, despite Türkiye's triumph over the West in its national struggle (Çalış, 2013: 195-228). This transformation in perspective represents an intriguing aspect of Türkiye's historical trajectory, illustrating the complex dynamics between power struggles, identity construction, and the allure of Western ideals.

As expounded upon in the preceding chapters, the emergence of the modern international system compelled multicultural empires to undergo abrupt transformations into nation-states, a process that often entailed significant upheaval and challenges. In this context, Türkiye found itself burdened with a stigmatized identity. To rectify this, the country pursued domestic and foreign policies aimed at securing its place within an inflexible international system shaped by Western, white, Christian, and secular values. From a Kemalist perspective, adherence to these values became a prerequisite for a state's inclusion in the international system. Consequently, during the period of Mustafa Kemal, Türkiye pursued an actively isolated foreign policy, influenced by historical experiences and the ideology of the Republic. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Ottoman Empire was perceived as a threat to the West during the formation of the Western-centric international system. The Empire engaged in wars against Western powers for extended periods, often controlling or having territorial ambitions over lands that were targets of Western imperialism. Additionally, the influence of the Caliphate over Muslim-majority regions posed a challenge to Western imperial aspirations. These factors caused the Ottoman Empire to be perceived as a destructive force in the international system. And this shaped Turkey's subsequent efforts to align itself with Western norms and values (Zarakol, 2010).

Hence, in order to address and rectify the stigma associated with its identity, the newly established Republic of Türkiye embarked on a transformative journey aimed at aligning the country with Western norms. This endeavor entailed a series of reforms,

such as the alphabet reforms, in the early years of the republic, with the overarching goal of establishing a secular and positivist structure in line with Western standards. Simultaneously, in its foreign policy, Türkiye adopted an isolated and non-confrontational approach, emphasizing that it posed no threat to the West. Domestically, the Republic focused on the arduous task of nation-building and homogenization, while internationally it pursued a policy of maintaining the borders defined by the National Pact, guided by the motto "peace at home, peace in the world." These actions exemplify Türkiye's strategic efforts to overcome its stigmatized identity, reconcile with the prevailing Western-centric international system, and project an image of stability and peace both internally and externally. (Zürcher, 2017, 166-175)

In Atatürk's speech, this is explained as follows. "It is quite natural and therefore simple to explain the fact that a country which is in the midst in the fundamental reforms and development should sincerely desire peace and tranquility both at home and in the world. (Atatürk, Nutuk) By employing this discourse, Atatürk effectively conveys to the global community that Türkiye does not harbor any revisionist or irredentist ambitions. Drawing upon Zarakol's framework, this discourse can be understood as a deliberate endeavor by the stigmatized actor to rectify its image. Motivated by the aspiration for acceptance and integration into the Western system, Türkiye actively seeks to correct any incongruent elements and align itself with the fundamental tenets of the system. Atatürk's declaration serves as a notable manifestation of Türkiye's proactive approach in addressing its stigmatized identity and aligning its domestic and foreign policies with the norms and values of the Western international system. This commitment to adaptation and conformity exemplifies Türkiye's concerted efforts to overcome the stigma and foster its inclusion within the international community.

Despite regarding Western civilization as an ideal, Türkiye has maintained a certain degree of skepticism towards the West, which can be attributed to historical traumas such as the wars, the occupation of Anatolia, and the Sévres Treaty. These experiences have shaped Türkiye's foreign policy stance, leading to a cautious and skeptical attitude towards Western powers. Within this context, non-Muslim minorities were perceived as potential threats that could be exploited by the West to foment rebellion.

The population exchange agreement with Greece, involving the displacement of Orthodox Christians in Türkiye and Muslims in Greece, serves as a tangible manifestation of the regime's pursuit of nation-building, homogeneity, and security objectives. The transition from a multinational and multireligious empire to a nation-state inherently involves the consolidation of power and the elimination of perceived threats to the new political structure. This trend is not unique to Türkiye but is observed in various parts of the world where empires have given way to nation-states. The nation-state formation process often entails the adoption of policies aimed at safeguarding the new structure and mitigating potential challenges to its stability.

When analyzing Türkiye's policies within the aforementioned framework, it becomes evident that the country exemplifies this trend of consolidating power and eliminating perceived threats. Notably, in addition to the decrease in the non-Muslim population, Anatolia witnessed an Islamization process, facilitated by the influx of Muslim immigrants from the Caucasus and the Balkans, as highlighted by Kösebalaban. (Kösebalaban, 2011, 8 – 10) This irony emerges from the fact that the regime was simultaneously pursuing a secularization agenda. These demographic shifts aimed to reinforce the nation-building and homogenization efforts of the new regime. Similarly, Türkiye's approach towards Arab countries was marked by skepticism due to historical memories of past rebellions. The caution exhibited in relations with both Western and Arab countries demonstrates Türkiye's underlying concerns and priorities in preserving its newly established nation-state. The convergence of demographic, religious, and geopolitical factors shaped Türkiye's policy decisions and reflects the broader patterns observed in the post-imperial nation-state formation process (Kösebalaban, 2011).

Despite Türkiye's concerted efforts to rectify the stigma attached to its identity through the implementation of stringent secular reforms, the influx of Muslim immigrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus into Anatolia, coupled with the subsequent Islamization of the region resulting from population exchanges with Greece, presents a paradoxical situation. This apparent contradiction can be attributed to several underlying factors. Firstly, the main enemy identified during Türkiye's struggle for independence was perceived to be Western and non-Muslim in nature. Despite the Kemalist regime's acceptance of non-Western elements as stigmatic, with a view to attaining Western

civilization as the ultimate goal, Türkiye's past experiences with the West have fostered a perception of it as an existential threat. Consequently, non-Muslim communities residing in Anatolia are viewed as potential instruments through which the West can interfere in Türkiye's internal affairs. This perspective has influenced Türkiye's approach to domestic and foreign policy, reflecting the intricate interplay between its aspirations for Western alignment and its historical apprehensions towards the West.

The unique circumstances surrounding the recent development of Muslim-majority countries can help shed light on the contradictory dynamics observed in Türkiye's quest for inclusion in the international system. As Aktürk highlights, the achievement of religious and sectarian homogeneity, akin to that observed in Western Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries, is an unprecedented phenomenon in most regions of the world (Aktürk, 2015). Western European countries such as Portugal, Spain, France and England had already achieved religious homogeneity during this period, and this is often overlooked when examining the process of formation of nation states in Western Europe. The process of fostering religious and sectarian homogeneity in Europe can be traced back to the 13th century, wherein efforts were made to eliminate factors that hindered such homogeneity. Consequently, early nation-states in Western Europe emerged as paragons of religious and sectarian uniformity (Ayla, 1993).

In contrast, Muslim-majority states did not undergo a similar experience of homogeneity in their natural course of development, but rather encountered it during Türkiye's endeavors to integrate into the international system. The historical skepticism stemming from Türkiye's past interactions with the West further compounds the complexity of the situation, offering insights into the underlying reasons for the apparent contradiction. By considering the distinctive historical trajectories and contextual factors that have shaped religious and sectarian dynamics, one can better comprehend the nuanced challenges faced by countries like Türkiye in reconciling their own identities with the international system.

## 4.2. An Overview of Atatürk Era Foreign Policy

In the early years of Türkiye, characterized by lingering suspicions towards the West, the government under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk cultivated positive relations with the Soviet Union. This relationship held significant importance as it served as a potential source of security for Türkiye's northern and eastern borders in the event of conflicts with European powers. Despite Türkiye's endeavors to rectify its stigmatized identity and integrate into the Western-dominated international system, the imperative to safeguard national security and territorial integrity compelled Türkiye to maintain a delicate balance of power between the West and the Soviets, until relations with the West could be restored and security concerns adequately addressed. The motivation underlying this strategic approach is evident in many aspects, including the bitter memories of territorial loss embedded in the Ottoman experience that continue to echo in the collective national memory. The recognition of this historical context informs Türkiye's cautious navigation of its foreign policy choices, as it seeks to strike a delicate equilibrium between security imperatives, the pursuit of Western integration, and the preservation of national sovereignty.

Türkiye's positive relations with the Soviet Union during its early years can be attributed to several factors. The Soviets helped develop bilateral relations positively by being the first country to officially recognize the Ankara government. Maintaining amicable ties with the Soviets was of paramount importance for Türkiye, as it sought to dispel any perceptions of pursuing Turanist or Islamist policies that could potentially strain their relationship. The underlying concern behind Türkiye's "Peace at home, peace in the world" policy was to safeguard its national territorial integrity, which extended to its interactions with Russia. By refraining from pursuing Turanist policies that could antagonize Russia, Türkiye aimed to demonstrate its departure from the characteristics associated with its Ottoman identity, thereby exhibiting a willingness to accept and rectify any stigmatic notions attached to its past. This serves as an illustrative example of Türkiye's proactive efforts to address the stigma it faced and cultivate positive relations with key international actors, such as the Soviet Union, in pursuit of its national interests and security.

Türkiye's favorable relations with the Soviet Union not only yielded diplomatic support but also military assistance, which played a crucial role in its early successes. A notable example of this was Kazım Karabekir's military campaign, resulting in the reclamation of Kars and Ardahan from the Armenians in 1920, marking a significant achievement for the Ankara government. Despite maintaining amicable ties with the Soviets, Türkiye remained cautious about foreign intervention and sought to limit the influence of the Communist Party within its borders. The aforementioned dichotomy with the example of Islamizing the population through population exchange despite westernization efforts, shows itself in the liquidation of the Communist Party's activities in parallel with the maintenance of good relations with the Soviets in line with the stigma correction strategy. This strategic approach underscores Türkiye's overarching objective of addressing the stigma while safeguarding its national pact borders.

Ankara government was to gain recognition with the Moscow agreement in March 1921 and to establish security in this region. During this period, the Soviets supported Türkiye economically and militarily against Britain and other European powers. This support stems not from ideology, but from common interests. The reason for Turkish and Soviet relations can be explained by the parallelism of the priorities of the regimes. Following the revolution in the Soviet Union, the publication of secret agreements and state-building processes encouraged friendly relations. This initial relationship can be seen as a marriage of convenience. But on the other hand, various communist trends can be seen in Türkiye through the eyes of the Soviets. For example, in the Turkish parliament from the years of the independence war, there were names that were labeled as pro-soviet called "İştirakiyyun". They were very close to the Soviets and were in contact with them. Mustafa Suphi was one of these names. He was assassinated in 1921 on his way from Trabzon to Sochi. The Soviets also wanted to influence Türkiye, but later they realized their limits. In this way, Soviet- Türkiye relations continued as a marriage of convenience. Türkiye's foreign policy in this period acted in line with the balance of power in the international arena and benefited from conflicts between countries. During the Lausanne negotiations, Türkiye benefited from this situation by applying a balance policy due to the opposing policies of Britain and the Soviet Union. (Hale, 2013, 41 – 55) (Oran, 2010, 88-10) (Kösebalaban, 2011,47 – 57) Although the

stigma has been accepted and is being tried to be corrected, a foreign policy in favor of only the West was not exhibited in the pre-Lausanne period.

In the 1930s, a shift in dynamics occurred in Europe with the rise of revisionist approaches by Germany, Bulgaria, and Italy, underpinning a change in the regional balance of power. During this period, fascist Italy's ambitions in the Aegean Sea and the Balkans posed a significant threat to the territorial integrity of both Türkiye and Greece. Consequently, the shared interests of the two countries brought them closer together. In 1932, Türkiye became a member of the League of Nations, while Germany withdrew in 1932 and Italy in 1935, thus highlighting the emerging dangers in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. As a result, a division between revisionist and status quo states emerged in the region. Greece, Yugoslavia, and Romania, satisfied with their territorial gains following the First World War, aligned with the status quo side, whereas Bulgaria and Hungary, discontented with their territorial losses, leaned towards revisionism.

In response to these developments, Türkiye forged closer relations with Balkan countries. Particularly, a strong alliance was formed with Greece, which shared a similar perspective in countering Italy's expansionist policies. Friendship and non-aggression agreements were signed, and reciprocal visits between Greek Prime Minister Venizelos and Turkish President İnönü took place. The presence of Italy in the Aegean islands and the rise of Nazi Germany raised concerns in the region. In light of these circumstances, the Balkan Entente Pact was established among Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Türkiye. However, these regional alliances proved inadequate in the face of major threats such as Germany. They did not entail a collective defense obligation in the event of external aggression but rather aimed at fostering cooperation.

Türkiye's peaceful and diplomatic approach during this period was widely recognized, as evidenced by Venizelos nominating Atatürk for the Nobel Peace Prize. These peaceful policies not only aligned with Türkiye's endeavor to rectify the stigma but also contributed to the improvement of its relations with the West. Notably, Türkiye maintained close ties with Britain and France, seeking to prevent a potential rapprochement between Türkiye and the Soviet Union. This effort resulted in the

Montreux Convention, which granted Türkiye control over the Straits and restricted the passage of warships. It is crucial to acknowledge that the Montreux Convention satisfied both Turkish and Soviet demands. During this time, Italy posed the greatest security concern for Türkiye, as it held control over certain islands in the Aegean Sea and pursued revisionist policies under Mussolini's leadership. Consequently, countering the Italian threat became a top priority for Türkiye's security agenda. (Hale, 2013, 31 – 55), (Kösebalaban, 2011, 48 – 53), (Zürcher, 2017, 202 - 205)

Although Hatay and Mosul were within the boundaries outlined in the National Pact, they were not incorporated into Türkiye's borders as stipulated by the Treaty of Lausanne. The integration of Hatay occurred after Atatürk's passing, despite Türkiye's persistent efforts in the 1930s. Initially, Hatay became an independent state with the approval of Britain and France, who sought to establish Türkiye as a barrier against Germany under Hitler's regime. Subsequently, Türkiye annexed Hatay through a plebiscite. In the case of Mosul, Türkiye claimed the region based on the Armistice of Mudros. During the negotiations of the Lausanne Treaty, Turkish-British discussions on Mosul were postponed and entrusted to the League of Nations. However, at the time, Türkiye was not yet a member of the League, while Britain held considerable power as a superpower.

During this period, the Sheikh Said rebellion erupted, and Türkiye responded to it forcefully. The British, citing Türkiye's alleged inability to resolve the Kurdish problem within its own borders, rejected Türkiye's claim over Mosul, which had a Kurdish majority. In return for relinquishing its claims on Mosul, Türkiye negotiated for a share of the oil revenues. Consequently, Mosul was included within the borders of Iraq, and the British mandate over the region was extended for 25 years. Türkiye also secured a 10 percent share of the oil revenues from Mosul. Although Mosul fell within the National Pact's defined borders, its acceptance can be explained by the fact that, as Zürcher points out, Türkiye could not afford to engage in further protracted conflicts. (Zürcher, 2017, 202-203) However, this thesis posits that the primary reason behind Türkiye's decision was the recognition that persistently pursuing its claims on Mosul would run counter to its strategy of stigma correction. Such a stance could have jeopardized its relations with the Western powers and undermined its efforts to

establish a firm position within the international system. Thus, Türkiye's approach to the Mosul issue can be interpreted through this lens.

The contrasting outcomes of the inclusion of Hatay and Mosul within the borders of the National Pact offer valuable insights into the dynamics of international politics and Türkiye's foreign policy during that era. The complex factors that influenced these issues shed light on the broader context in which they unfolded. Firstly, it is crucial to recognize the enduring influences of World War One in the region during the 1920s. Britain, as a superpower, retained significant geopolitical leverage in global affairs. Simultaneously, Türkiye was preoccupied with internal political matters, particularly the implementation of reforms aimed at state-building. The divergent fate of Hatay and Mosul was further shaped by the discovery of oil reserves in the Mosul governorate, which introduced additional complexities (Saygı, 2015: 157-174).

In light of these circumstances, it becomes evident that Türkiye faced substantial challenges in pursuing a confrontational policy against Britain. (Zürcher, 2017, 201) It was inconceivable for Türkiye to act against the ongoing efforts to rectify the stigmatic aspects ingrained within its identity. Failure to uphold the principles of stigma correction would have compromised the effectiveness of domestic reforms and the country's active isolationist foreign policy stance. Moreover, Türkiye's aspiration to secure a position within the Western-centric international community would have been severely jeopardized. Significantly, any doubts and stigmas that had been alleviated through domestic reforms and foreign policy positioning would resurface in the collective memory of the Western powers, undermining Türkiye's progress.

The contrasting outcomes between Hatay and Mosul shed light on the differing circumstances surrounding these two regions. Unlike the governorate of Mosul, Hatay did not possess significant oil resources, and its inclusion occurred just prior to the outbreak of World War II. The strategic considerations differed for France, which shared a land border with Germany, compared to Britain as an island nation with a distinct advantage in defending against land-based military attacks. Thus, it was in France's interest to align with Türkiye to counterbalance Germany's influence. This alignment not only served France's objectives but also aligned with Türkiye's efforts to correct its stigmatic identity. Furthermore, Britain supported Türkiye's stance on the

Hatay issue. Consequently, Hatay became part of Türkiye while Mosul did not. Following this agreement, Turkish-European relations, particularly with Britain, experienced positive progress. This allowed Türkiye to shift its focus more towards domestic matters rather than external concerns, enabling the country to prioritize internal development. (Kösebalaban, 2011, 58 – 60), (Hale, 2013, 39 – 54), (Zürcher, 2017, 202-3)

During that period, the Kurdish rebellions posed a significant security threat to Türkiye. Following events such as the Mount Ararat Rebellion, the rebels sought refuge along the Iranian border, utilizing the strategic location of Mount Ararat. In order to prevent the recurrence of such incidents, Türkiye engaged in a border agreement with Iran, resulting in the acquisition of the entire Mount Ararat in exchange for a territory near Van. This territorial adjustment aimed to enhance border security and mitigate the challenges posed by Kurdish insurgencies. Another noteworthy development in addressing the Kurdish insurgency issue was the establishment of the Sadabad Pact. This pact was formed by Türkiye, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan, countries that shared similar concerns regarding border security. (Kösebalaban, 2011, 54)

In summary, the foreign policy pursued during Atatürk's era can be attributed to various factors that led to the implementation of an active isolation approach. The norms and values associated with the Ottoman Empire, which had once posed a threat to the West, became stigmatized within the prevailing Western-centric international system in the 20th century. As the Kemalist elites embarked on domestic reforms aligned with Western norms and values, they sought to secure a place for Türkiye within this international system by adopting an active isolation policy. Consequently, a persistent pursuit of peace-oriented strategies aimed to eradicate traces of the Ottoman Empire and rectify the stigmatic non-Western elements embedded within Türkiye's identity. Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the contextual conditions that facilitated the implementation of this active isolation policy. While the Cold War era posed challenges for such a policy, the 1920s and 1930s provided a conducive environment. Türkiye's foreign policy during this period was significantly influenced by the War of Independence and the aftermath of the first World War. The Great Depression and the preparations for the second World War played a pivotal role, particularly in shaping the latter half of the 1930s. Key areas of focus within Türkiye's

foreign policy agenda during this period included the security of Thrace, demilitarization of the straits, modernization of the military, engagement with the Soviet Union, and the signing of defense agreements to cultivate favorable relations with Britain and France. In essence, Türkiye's foreign policy during Atatürk's era can be characterized by its commitment to safeguarding the boundaries of the Republic during a period of nation-building and its pursuit of peaceful coexistence as encapsulated by Atatürk's slogan, "peace at home, peace in the world." This stance aimed to assure the world, particularly the West, that Türkiye harbored no revisionist or irredentist aspirations.

#### **4.3. The Impact of the Treaty of Sévres on Domestic and Foreign Policy**

The First World War held significant ramifications for the transformation of Anatolia. Following the Ottoman Empire's defeat and the occupation of Istanbul by British forces, the Entente powers compelled the Ottoman Empire to sign the Treaty of Sévres. According to this treaty, control of the Straits was to be entrusted to an international commission, while Izmir and its environs were to be placed under Greek administration for a period of five years, with the potential for incorporation into Greek territory through a subsequent plebiscite. Eastern Thrace, where Turks constituted a minority, was designated as Greek territory. The treaty also outlined the establishment of an Armenian state encompassing Erzurum, Trabzon, Van, and Bitlis, as well as a future independent Kurdish state with local autonomy. The Ottoman Empire would relinquish the Arab territories it had lost during the war or earlier, as well as Cyprus and the Aegean Islands. Furthermore, the agreement recognized Italian dominance in southern Anatolia and French control in Adana and its environs. As a result, the Ottomans were left with sole governance over Istanbul, central, and northern Anatolia, subject to a range of economic and military restrictions (Hale, 2013: 32 – 37) (Kösebalaban, 2011: 45 – 53).

This agreement played a critical role in the history of the region, presenting considerable challenges and necessitating subsequent efforts to redefine Türkiye's national boundaries and shape its future trajectory. For a treaty to be valid, signing is not only condition but also it must be ratified at the parliament, then signed by the head of state and published in the official newspaper (Pazarcı, 1999: 127). Although the

Treaty of Sèvres was not a valid agreement in this sense, it has deeply affected Turkish domestic and foreign policy.

The reform movements undertaken by the Ottoman Empire marked an earnest attempt to bridge the power gap with the Western world. Initiated seriously in the 17th century, these reform efforts persisted over an extended period as the empire sought to narrow the disparity with the West. However, eventually, a significant shift occurred, whereby the Ottoman Empire especially the political and military elites within it came to accept the perceived superiority of the West. This acceptance of Western superiority is closely tied to the concept of stigma, as discussed in this thesis. While the late Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Türkiye to be established afterwards acknowledged and idealized Western dominance, doubts emerged due to the complex nature of its relationship with the West, characterized by protracted periods of warfare and Western ambitions that posed threats to the territorial integrity of Anatolia. A striking historical event encapsulating this dynamic is the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which exemplifies the Sevres Syndrome. This syndrome embodies the collective memory and deep-seated apprehensions stemming from the perceived betrayal of Anatolia's territorial integrity by Western powers. Despite aspiring to emulate the West, the Ottoman Empire's experience of external challenges and conflicts gave rise to skepticism regarding the West's intentions and motivations. This multifaceted relationship with the West—marked by admiration, aspiration, but also suspicion—forms a complex backdrop against which Türkiye navigated its quest for modernization and the pursuit of Western ideals (Davutoğlu, 2001).

Following the occupation of Anatolia by the Entente powers, a resistance movement emerged in response, leading to a pivotal shift in the region's dynamics. Through the Erzurum and Sivas Congresses, the leadership of the resistance movement fell into the hands of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Bostancı, 2015).

Prior to the Treaty of Sèvres, the Ankara movement and the Istanbul government maintained a level of coordination and a relatively favorable relationship until March 1920 (Karakoç, 2019). During this period, the Istanbul government strategically employed the opposition of the Ankara movement as leverage against European countries, thereby legitimizing the discontent prevailing within the nation. However,

the reappointment of Ferit Pasha as grand vizier by the Sultan, along with the Amasya negotiations, signaled a shift in priorities for both the Ankara movement and the Istanbul government.

The harsh measures taken against the sides of the reign illustrate how the issue of hostility towards the dynasty and the Ottoman Empire permeated Turkish domestic politics for an extended period, an issue that remains significant to this day. This historical context underscores the complexities and enduring repercussions of the events surrounding the Treaty of Sèvres on Türkiye's internal dynamics. (Zürcher, 2017, 133-165) (Oran, 2010, 61-67)

The Treaty of Sèvres granted privileges and rights to non-Muslims, Kurds, and Armenians, which posed a threat to Turkish national integrity, thereby profoundly influencing both domestic and foreign policies. In terms of domestic policy, the nation-building process sought to establish a homogeneous structure rather than embracing multiculturalism. Consequently, reforms were implemented with this objective in mind. The Kurds were officially designated as ethnic Turks, supported by anthropological and linguistic studies aimed at demonstrating the ancient Turkish heritage in Anatolia. The Sun Language Theory was among these endeavors. The pursuit of a homogeneous nation was furthered through reforms in various sectors, including the education system. Any social movement or dissenting voices opposing homogeneity were met with harsh suppression, and Turkification policies were observed during this period (Aktar, 1980: 29 – 62).

On the international stage, measures such as the population exchange agreement with Greece were also implemented to serve the purpose of establishing homogeneity. The Treaty of Sèvres highlighted the perceived threat to the country's integrity posed by minorities and non-Muslims through the rights they were granted. The Turkish Republic successfully averted this perceived danger through the implementation of the population exchange agreement (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2014: 9 – 32).

Overall, the Treaty of Sèvres significantly shaped Turkish policies, leading to the prioritization of homogeneity in nation-building and the suppression of dissenting voices. By addressing the perceived threats to Turkish national integrity, both

domestically and through international agreements, the Turkish Republic sought to establish a cohesive and unified nation.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### 5.1. Introduction

The transition from the Arabic script to the Latin one in Türkiye, known as the alphabet reform, has been a subject of extensive debate since its implementation. Both proponents and critics have presented influential viewpoints, yet their arguments often lack robust empirical evidence. The Kemalist position, which aimed to legitimize the reform, primarily relied on rhetorical discourse to support the nation-building process and establish a new identity, rather than substantiated empirical correlations between the Arabic script and Turkish literacy rates. On the other hand, detractors of the reform frequently highlighted its underlying objective of westernization and detachment from Türkiye's Ottoman heritage, focusing on perceived outcomes rather than exploring the root causes that prompted this transformative revolution.

The Kemalist perspective on adopting the Latin alphabet was based on the belief that the Arabic script presented significant obstacles to progress and development. Advocates argued that the Arabic alphabet's limitations in accurately representing Turkish sounds made reading and writing Turkish challenging. In contrast, they viewed the Latin alphabet as better suited to phonetically represent the Turkish language. Consequently, Kemalists contended that the Arabic script hindered the increase in Turkish literacy rates among the population. Additionally, the emergence of advanced technologies provided further support for the preference of the Latin alphabet due to its cost efficiencies in printing. Moreover, the Kemalist ideology justified the reform by asserting that the Arabic script complicated the learning of Turkish and impeded foreigners, including minority groups, from comprehending and engaging with Turkish society.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this viewpoint has faced opposition from its critics. Many have raised pertinent inquiries about the Kemalist argument, highlighting that using the Arabic script was not limited to Türkiye and had been widely adopted in diverse contexts throughout the Islamic world. They assert that several nations utilizing the Arabic alphabet have made significant strides in scientific fields, challenging the notion that the script inherently obstructs progress. Detractors contend that the Kemalist initiative was driven not solely by aspirations for modernization but also by a deep-rooted desire to sever historical ties with Türkiye's Ottoman past and establish a new, secular Turkish identity.

As elucidated in the preceding paragraph, there exists a notable deficiency of compelling research regarding the rationale behind Türkiye's alphabet reform. The Kemalist position has been subject to criticism for its dearth of empirical evidence and reliance on rhetorical discourse, primarily serving the nation-building process and the establishment of a secular identity. Conversely, opponents of the reform have been scrutinized for their focus on the reform's outcomes rather than delving into its underlying root causes.

Nevertheless, the enigma surrounding the primary motivation behind Türkiye's alphabet reform remained unresolved, as its decision diverged from mainstream choices made by many other countries. The process of nation-state establishment has been intricately shaped by westernization and modernization; a path followed by numerous nations. However, Türkiye's unique stance in changing its alphabet sets it apart from others. In contrast to Türkiye, countries such as Russia, Israel, Japan, Korea, and more have retained their alphabets despite undergoing modernization. Additionally, even within European societies, the adoption of the Latin alphabet as a new script has not been universally embraced, as evidenced by the example of Greece. This distinctive choice by Türkiye called for further investigation into its underlying motivations and sets it apart as an intriguing case for study (Hale, 2012: 8-35).

This thesis contends that Türkiye's identity structure has undergone a transformation shaped by the Western-centered nature of the international system. This situation deeply affected the development and course of Türkiye. The thesis posits that the impetus behind the alphabet reform can be traced to the Western-centered international

system, which took root during the stagnation and eventual collapse of the empire. This reform can be understood as Türkiye's endeavor to position itself within this global framework and assert its new secular identity in accordance with Western norms and standards in response to the challenges and changes brought about by the evolving international order.

## **5.2. Stigma and the International System**

Informed by Ayşe Zarakol's seminal work "After Defeat," this thesis adopts Erving Goffman's theory of "stigma" and Norbert Elias's distinctions of "the Established and the Outsiders" as its conceptual framework. Through this approach, the thesis aims to explore how the Western-centered international system influences Türkiye's identity formation. In this context, the dominant norms and rules within the system are shaped by the established members, thereby attributing normalcy to the characteristics of the dominant elements and stigmatizing those that deviate from these norms. Consequently, actors situated outside the established system are subject to stigmatization. This framework also holds relevance in the context of international relations, where power dynamics and established norms have a crucial potential in (re)shaping the identities and perceptions of nation-states (Zarakol, 2010).

The international system in the 19th century was marked by a hierarchical structure, where Western countries held a privileged position as the Established, while non-Western, non-European, and non-Christian countries were categorized as Outsiders. Consequently, those states that did not conform to Western norms experienced stigmatization, leading to a dramatic and critical impact on their self-perception. The process of modernization intensified these emotions as non-Western state communities sought acceptance and legitimacy in international relations. The adoption of isolationist policies, exemplified by North Korea, stood as an exception, with most countries endeavoring to align their domestic and foreign policies with Western ideals to overcome the perceived stigma. This endeavor involved comprehensive reforms and a pursuit of modernity as a means to secure their position in the international community and bridge the gap between the Established and the Outsiders. As a result, numerous states actively engaged with global norms and institutions, striving to shed the stigma of non-Westernism and gain recognition on the world stage. This dynamic

underscores the historical significance of the relationship between Western and non-Western states within the international system, highlighting the complexities of identity, acceptance, and the pursuit of legitimacy in a global context (Zarakol, 2010: 52-59).

In the context of the international system, stigmatized actors often seek to accept and normalize their position through two distinct approaches. The first option involves a transitional process, wherein the stigma is perceived as temporary, non-essential, and accidental, leading to an expectation of rapid integration with the center. A pertinent example is found in Greece's historical perspective, which considers the 500 years of Ottoman rule as a regrettable misfortune. To normalize its status, Greece emphasizes its Western connections, aiming to align itself more closely with the Established in the international arena.

The second option for stigmatized actors is the notion of correction, akin to the metaphorical concept of plastic surgery. In this approach, non-Western elements in the identity, specifically the stigmas, are targeted for correction. For instance, Türkiye exemplifies this process through its alphabet reform, wherein it undertook steps to correct a non-Western stigmatized element within its identity, thereby advancing towards normalization. Notably, the timing of the actor's realization of the stigma in their identity plays a pivotal role in determining their subsequent behavior. Actors like Türkiye, who become aware of their stigmatized status against Western norms and standards later in their historical development, may respond with more decisive measures to correct the stigmas, as suggested by Zarakol's analysis (Zarakol, 2010: 29).

One of Türkiye's endeavors to counter its stigmatized perception was the implementation of reforms to transform public Islamic practices into more private aspects of daily life. The alphabet reform, which constituted an essential aspect of this pursuit, stands as a compelling example. Through these efforts, Türkiye aimed to demonstrate its commitment to aligning with Western norms and secure its position within the international community. Overall, the case of Türkiye's alphabet reform and its approach to addressing stigmas in light of Western norms exemplify the complex

dynamics involved in the normalization process for stigmatized actors in the international system.

### **5.3. The Impact of the Western-Centered International System on Alphabet Reform**

The thesis endeavors to elucidate the effects of the transformation in the international system on Türkiye and its intellectuals through various sections. A key focal point is the analysis of the alphabet reform, which is posited as an endeavor by a stigmatized actor to rectify its perceived stigma. To accomplish this, the "Historical Background of the Formation Process of the Reformist Mentality" section delves into the ideologies that emerged during the declining period of the empire, seeking to restore its former power, and how these ideologies evolved over time, influenced notably by the westernization and modernization movements, particularly evident in the Tanzimat era. Consequently, these actors gradually accepted Western norms and standards, asserting that Westernization offered the true path for the country. Such acceptance is viewed as the initial reaction to the stigma, signifying the stigmatized actor's embrace of Western norms to gain acceptance within the Western international community.

The thesis posits that the alphabet reform exemplifies this process. Initially, the visual aspect of the Arabic alphabet was associated with the Islamic values represented by the Ottoman Empire. However, the Republic of Türkiye undertook efforts to eliminate all visible non-Western stigmatized elements from its identity, seeking to become an integral part of the community of secular European states. This became the primary impetus behind adopting the Latin alphabet. The thesis critically examines the claims put forth by the Kemalists regarding the inherent incompatibility of the Arabic alphabet, finding them to lack empirical evidence and logical basis, but heavily influenced by ideology. The Sun Language Theory, in conjunction with language policies, constitutes an integral part of the alphabet reform, aiming to address vocabularies entered Turkish through religion, thus aligning both language policies and the alphabet reform towards a shared goal.

Additionally, the thesis addresses the perspectives of "Garbcılar," who advocated extreme Westernization, and demonstrates how their ideas were implemented through

the reformative initiatives with the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye (Hanioglu, 1997: 133 – 135).

In summary, the thesis undertakes a comprehensive investigation into the interplay between the international system's transformation, the alphabet reform, and Türkiye's nation-building process, shedding light on the processes of stigma correction and Westernization as crucial factors influencing Türkiye's identity formation and positioning within the global community.

#### **5.4. The Impact of the Western-Centered International System on Foreign Policy in Atatürk Era**

This section delves into an examination of the enduring impact of Türkiye's protracted struggle against the West on its national identity, despite efforts towards westernization. The War of Independence is characterized by confrontations with Christian Western nations, highlighting the longstanding ambitions of Western countries towards Anatolian and Ottoman territories, a sentiment epitomized in the Sevres syndrome. Consequently, Türkiye approached the West with a degree of skepticism, even as it embraced Western secular values, placing the notion of purified Islam at the core of its conceptual framework during the establishment of the republic.

The thesis posits that Türkiye's pursuit of inclusion in the Western-centered international system becomes apparent in its foreign policy during the Atatürk period. Recognizing the historical perception of the Ottoman Empire as a threat to the West, Türkiye implemented an active isolation policy, seeking to correct this stigmatized perception. With the guiding motto of "peace at home, peace in the world," Türkiye conveyed to the West that its irredentist ambitions inherited from the Ottoman era had been relinquished. Furthermore, the thesis explores the transformation in the international system and the effects of Türkiye's relations with dominant members of this system, exemplified through the lens of the Sevres Syndrome (Kösebalaban, 2011).

In summary, this section offers a comprehensive analysis of how Türkiye's historical struggles and its efforts to integrate into the Western-dominated international system

have shaped its national identity and foreign policy during the Atatürk period, with a focus on disentangling itself from past notions of irredentism.



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