

*Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*  
*Journal of Sakarya University Faculty of Theology*

e-ISSN: 1304-6535

Cilt/Volume: 26, Sayı/Issue: 50, Yıl/Year: 2024 (Aralık/December)

**Nationalizing a Nation by Vernacularizing its Religion:  
The Translation of the Azān from the Perspective of  
Rewriting and Norms**

*Bir Ulusu Millileştirmek İçin Dinini Yerlileştirmek: Yeniden Yazım ve  
Normlar Perspektifinden Ezanın Çevirisi*

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**Makale Bilgisi – Article Information**

**Makale Türü/Article Type:** Araştırma Makalesi/ Research Article

**Geliş Tarihi/Date Received:** 19/08/2024

**Kabul Tarihi/Date Accepted:** 04/11/2024

**Yayın Tarihi/Date Published:** 15/12/2024

Atf/Citation: Sunar, Zeynep Elife. "Nationalizing a Nation by Vernacularizing its Religion: The Translation of the Azān from the Perspective of Rewriting and Norms". *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 26/50 (2024), 517-537. <https://doi.org/10.17335/sakaifd.1535910>.

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## Abstract

The Turkish translation of the azān, the Muslim call to prayer, in the early Republican era stood as a striking symbol of the drastic changes witnessed in the Turkish state and its people as attempts to secularize the nation and redefine its identity dominated the state's socio-political agenda. Evaluating this phenomenon from the perspective of Translation Studies can reveal novel insights into why the azān was translated and why it was met with resistance. This case study attempted to rethink the translation of the azān from the perspective of rewriting and to explore its negative reception from the perspective of norms, with particular emphasis placed on the setting and historical context of the translation. Based on the ideological motives portrayed and the other reforms implemented by the state, or in other words, the patron, it is possible to argue that the translation of the azān can be regarded as an act of rewriting. The opposition directed towards it can be accounted for by the norms of the people opposing it. Based on their history with the Islamic belief system, it can be assumed that Islam and its Arabic practices played a big part in the values that make up their norms.

**Keywords:** Translation Studies, Rewriting, Norms, Turkish Azān, Ideology, Manipulation.

## Öz

Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Arapça ezanın Türkçeye çevrilmesi, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'ne geçişte görülen büyük çaplı değişikliklerin çarpıcı bir simgesi haline gelmiştir. Bu değişikliklerin büyük çoğunluğunun, yeni kurulan devletin sosyo-politik gündemi doğrultusunda ülkenin ulusal ve kültürel kimliğinin yeniden inşa edilmesi amacıyla yapıldığını söylemek mümkündür. Ezanın çevirisine laikleşme ve yeni bir kimliğin inşa edilmesi sürecinde önemli bir rol biçilmiş olmasının anlamlandırılabilmesi için bu çeviri olgusunu dönemin diğer önemli reform ve yenilikleri bağlamında ele almak yanlış olmayacaktır. Bu bağlamda yeni kurulan cumhuriyetin bu değişikliklere yönelik politikaları ve tutumunun da dikkate alınması gerekmektedir. Ancak ezanın çevirisinden söz ederken bu çevirinin toplumun büyük bir kesiminden aldığı tepki de göz ardı edilemez. Büyük ayaklanmalar halini alabilen bu tepkinin nedenini anlamlandırabilmek için Türk toplumunun tarihi bağlamında İslam'ın ve dolayısıyla da ezanın önemini ve ibadetlerde başvurulan Arapça dilinin "Allah'ın kelamı" olarak tarif edilen Kur'an-ı Kerim ile bağdaştırılıyor olmasını da dikkate almak gerekmektedir. Bu çalışma, bu amaçlar doğrultusunda ezanın Türkçeye çevrilmiş olmasını ve bu çevirinin gördüğü tepkiyi bahsi geçen bağlamlara oturtarak bu çeviri faaliyetine farklı bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, bahsi geçen olaylara tarihsel bir açıklama sunmak veya dönemin ideolojilerine yorum getirmek değildir. Bu ve bunun gibi erken Cumhuriyet Dönemini konu alan çalışmaların birçoğu, belirli grupları ideolojik gerekçelere dayanarak eleştirdiği algısı oluşturmaktadır. Fakat bu çalışma, ezanın çevirisine ve bu çevirinin karşılaştığı direniş ve olumsuz tepkiye çeviribilim disiplindeki kavramlardan beslenen farklı bir bakış açısı sunmayı amaçlamıştır. Vaka çalışması yönteminden faydalanan bu çalışma, bahsi geçen amaç doğrultusunda çeviribilim araştırmalarına sıkça konu olan André Lefevere'in yeniden yazım (*rewriting*), patronaj ve manipülasyon kavramları ile Gideon Toury'ninki başta olmak üzere normlara yönelik yaklaşımlara başvurmuştur. Lefevere'e göre yeniden yazım olarak tarif edilebilecek metinlerin tamamı, amaçları ne olursa olsun, belirli bir ideolojiyi ve poetikayı yansıtır; diğer bir deyişle metinler, belirli bir toplumda belirli bir şekilde işlev görmesi için manipüle edilir. Yeniden yazım, gücü elinde tutanların amaçlarına hizmet etmek için uygulanan bir manipülasyondur. Patronaj, yeniden yazım sürecini, ürününü ve bu metinlerin dağıtımını manipüle etmek için uygulanan güçtür; bu gücü kendi ideolojik amaçlarına hizmet etmek için kullanan kişi, kurum, grup veya sosyal sınıflar ise patronlardır. Ezanın çevirisi bu kavramlar doğrultusunda düşünülecek olursa devletin patronaja sahip olduğu ve yeni kurulan cumhuriyetle birlikte açtığı yeni sayfada milleti için Batı odaklı bir ulusal ve kültürel kimlik inşa etme amacıyla toplum yaşamının belirli alanlarını manipüle edip yeniden yazdığı söylenebilir. Bu alanlardan biri, ulusal kimliğin önemli bir sembolü sayılabilecek ve dönemin belki de en çarpıcı reformlarına uğrayan dildir. Hem Latin alfabesine geçilmiş olması hem de Türkçenin Arapça ve Farsçanın etkilerinden arındırılması amacıyla kurulan Türk Dil Kurumu bunun kanıtı niteliğindedir. Benzer batılılaşma girişimleri Osmanlı edebiyatında da gözlemlenmekteydi. Bu girişimler, Türk kültür repertuarını zenginleştirmek ve Batı ideallerini Türkiye'ye aktarmak amacıyla Batı hümanist klasiklerinin çevrilmesini teşvik eden Tercüme Bürosu'nun kurulmasıyla somutlaşan yoğun çeviri çabalarına yol açmıştır. Bu reformlar, ezanın ve

namazın Türkçeleştirilmesini içeren dini reformlara öncülük etmiştir. Devletin Türk insanının ulusal ve kültürel kimliğini yeniden yazabilmek için dinini de millileştirmeyi gerekli gördüğü söylenebilir, çünkü din hâlihazırda kimliklerinin önemli bir parçasını oluşturmaktaydı. Bütün bu dilsel, edebi ve dini reformlar göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, ezanın çevirisinin basit bir diller arası aktarımın ötesine geçtiğini, Türk halkının ulusal ve kültürel kimliğinin neredeyse bütün yönlerini yeniden yazmaya yönelik daha büyük bir planın parçası olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Fakat İslam dininin ve ibadetlerinin Türk insanının ulusal kimliğini yansıtacak şekilde Türkçeleştirilmesi büyük ölçüde direnişle karşılandı. 1933 yılında Bursa Ulu Cami’de ezanın Arapça okunmasıyla birlikte başlayan isyan bu direnişin en büyük örneklerindendir. Türkçe ezanın direnişle karşılaşmasını anlamlandırabilmek için ise İslam inancının Osmanlı tarihindeki yerine ve sınırları içinde yaşayan Müslüman kesimin ibadetlerini nasıl yerine getirdiğine bakmak gerekmektedir. Türk toplumu, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu kurulmadan yüzyıllar önce İslam’la tanışmış ve beraberinde getirdiği ibadetleri yüzyıllardır yerine getirmekteydi. Taklidinin imkânsız olduğuna inanılan Kur’an-ı Kerim’in dilinin Arapça olmasının, bu ibadetlerin yerine getirilmesinde Arapçayı kutsal kıldığı söylenebilir. Müslüman kesim için ezan Kur’an-ı Kerim’in bir parçası olmasa da beş vakit namazla doğrudan bağlantılıydı ve yüzyıllardır süregelen bir ibadet geleneğinin parçasıydı. Tourny, bunun gibi toplumsal gelenek ve alışkanlıklara norm çerçevesinden bakmayı tercih etmiştir. Ona göre normlar, bir topluluğun değerlerine ve fikirlerine dayanan ve belirli durumlarda neyin kabul edilebilir veya kabul edilemez, tahammül edilebilir veya tahammül edilemez olduğunu belirleyen "davranış talimatları"dır. Tourny, norm yaklaşımını çeviri faaliyetine de uygulayarak çevrilecek metnin seçiminde bile bu normların etkisinin olabileceğine, hatta çevirisi yapılacak metnin onlar tarafından çeviriye uygun görülecek bir metin olacağı yönünde toplumda bir beklenti olduğuna dikkat çekmektedir. Bu norm ve beklentilere aykırı bir metin seçimi yapıldığında ise, tıpkı ezanın çevirisinde olduğu gibi, direnişle karşılaşılma ihtimali yüksektir. Buna dayanarak bu direnişe yol açanın, devletin patronaj yoluyla uyguladığı ideoloji ile Müslüman toplumun o dönemdeki normatif beklentileri arasındaki uçurumun olduğunu söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Türk halkına göre devletin diğer laikleşme çabaları da göz önüne alındığında ezanın artık Türkçe okunuyor olması, ibadetlerin kutsal diline, hatta İslâm’ın kendisine yönelik bir saldırıydı. Yeniden yazım ve normlara yönelik bu açıklamalara bakıldığında ezanın Türkçeye çevrilmesini bir yeniden yazım faaliyeti veya patronajın desteklediği ideolojiye dayanan bir manipülasyon girişimi olarak çerçevelemenin mümkün olduğu ve halkın sergilediği olumsuz tepkinin normatif beklentileriyle açıklanabileceği sonucuna varılabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çeviribilim, Yeniden Yazım, Normlar, Türkçe Ezan, İdeoloji, Manipülasyon.

## Introduction

To this day, the translation of the Muslim call to prayer, also known as the *azân* or *ezân* by Turks, into Turkish in the early years of the Republic of Türkiye continues to be regarded as a noteworthy event that signifies the drastic shifts the state and its people went through in an effort to redefine and reestablish the nation’s image on the national, cultural, political, and social levels. Particularly on account of the ideological nuances, it is deemed to bear and the opposition it was faced with, the discussion of the translation of the call to prayer can yield interesting questions and possible explanations in regard to the important role assigned to the translation of the *azân* in the process of secularization and the construction of a new national and cultural identity, the reason it was translated, and the possible rationale behind the resistance the translation faced. It is particularly these discussions that this study aims to delve into. To achieve this, it would prove beneficial to consider this translation phenomenon in the context of the other significant and drastic reforms of the period. In this sense, the newly established Republic’s stance and policies

regarding such changes should also be taken into consideration. The significance Muslim practices such as daily prayers bore for the Turkish people based on their long history with Islam is another inquiry that should be included within these discussions.

This research endeavors to approach the topic of the translation of the *azān* from the perspective of Translation Studies, specifically from the perspective of André Lefevere's concepts of rewriting, patronage, patron, and manipulation, as well as Gideon Toury's approach to norms. To put it more precisely, the purpose of this study is to rethink the translation of the call to prayer as a rewriting phenomenon and to analyze the opposition it was faced with from the perspective of Toury's approach to norms, particularly preliminary translational norms, in the meantime placing emphasis on the historical context of Islam and its Arabic practices in the Ottoman period and situating the translation of the *azān* among other major reforms of the period to gain an understanding of the bigger picture of the state's sociopolitical agenda during the period.

Before proceeding to the details of the study, it is important to note one caveat. This concerns the dichotomous portrayal of the state and the people of the early Republican era of Türkiye. The analysis below and many others of the like tend to run the risk of painting a black-and-white polarized image of its people and the state, with Western ideologists on one side and Ottoman-rooted oppositionists on the other. Needless to say, this may be a misleading representation of the period as it is more than likely that the people and their issues of the time were too complex and nuanced to be explained based on a black-and-white polarity. Additionally, this study does not aim to make remarks on the ideologies that governed the people's and state's actions. As stated previously, the sole purpose of this study is to provide a perspective informed by Translation Studies on the translation of the *azān* and the possible reasons behind its negative reception by a considerable portion of the Turkish people.

## 1. Methodology

This study undertook the aforementioned research based on the case study method. Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva defines a case within translation studies research as "a unit of translation or interpreting-related activity, product, person, etc., in real life, which can only be studied or understood in the context in which it is embedded."<sup>1</sup> For this particular emphasis placed on the context of the translation phenomenon, this research studies the act of translating the *azān* and the opposition directed to it by some with a focus on the contexts in

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1 Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva, "The Case Study Research Method in Translation Studies", *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer* 3/1 (March 2009), 40.

which they are embedded. Following discussions of their historical and cultural contexts, the Turkish translation of the *azān* and its negative reception are evaluated with an approach that draws upon Translation Studies. This is done in an effort to rethink these phenomena from a different angle and reframe them by making use of the concepts of rewriting and norms.

Such an approach entails a qualitative descriptive research method for the analysis and processing of research data. Qualitative research methods produce opportunities for exploration into social phenomena to gain insights into their inner workings and circumstances. Such methods highlight the social context within which said phenomena take place.<sup>2</sup> Qualitative descriptive research methods place additional emphasis on providing descriptions for the 'who, what, why, and where' of the experiences from the viewpoint of the people experiencing said phenomena.<sup>3</sup> This case study has therefore employed the qualitative descriptive research method to study and describe the Turkish translation of the Arabic call to prayer within its social and political context from the perspective of those who experienced it during the Republican era of Türkiye.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study consists of two main concepts, namely rewriting and norms. Both will be discussed separately in the following subsections.

### 2.1. Rewriting, patronage, and manipulation

The conceptualization of translation as rewriting was initially proposed by André Lefevere. The preface of the second edition of his book on rewriting claims that translations are essentially rewritings of source texts, noting that all rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society.<sup>4</sup>

This description draws attention to the notion of translation, or rewriting, as an act of manipulation. This seems to hinge on the assumption that all translations are governed by a certain purpose or a combination of purposes, with the goal of manipulating original texts to serve said purposes and to

2 Umesh Kemparaj - Sangeeta Chavan, "Qualitative Research: A Brief Description", *Indian Journal of Medical Sciences* 67/3-4 (2013), 90.

3 Steven Hall - Linda Liebenberg, "Qualitative Description as an Introductory Method to Qualitative Research for Master's-Level Students and Research Trainees", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (Accessed October 30 2024).

4 André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (New York: Routledge, 2017), vii.

adapt these to certain ideologies or poetics.<sup>5</sup> This manipulation is not limited to the negative sense it may evoke but can include not only restrictive forces such as distortion and censorship but also innovative ones that include the introduction of new concepts and genres in the target literary system. As such, rewritings can have great influence and can hold a shaping power over a given culture.<sup>6</sup> Considering that both the product and process of translations do not take place in a vacuum, it can be argued that they are subject to a number of forces originating from the contexts and systems they are a part of and can also be utilized to engender certain forces and influences on these contexts and systems as well. After all, translation is an activity that is socially contextualized.<sup>7</sup>

Another concept that is closely related to rewriting is that of patronage. This is defined by Lefevere as individual persons or groups of people, institutions, social classes, or the like that hold the power to influence the creation and dissemination of texts. In this sense, patronage is the force exerted to manipulate the process and product of text creation or rewriting, while the people or institutions that are able to wield this force are patrons.<sup>8</sup> It is safe to say that the patronage possessed by these patrons is influenced and informed by the ideologies they abide by. As such, this patronage can be expected to be exerted to manipulate or maintain text production in a way that aligns with their ideological agenda.

According to Lefevere, these forces consist of a combination of components; due to its subject matter, this study will choose to refer only to the ideological component mentioned above. He clarifies that this does not necessarily refer only to political agendas sought by political parties or people in positions of authority but can include a network of beliefs and conventions that govern people's actions. It is concerned with "what society should be or can be allowed to be."<sup>9</sup> Aksoy,<sup>10</sup> in her study that analyzes the rewriting of Türkiye's national literature in the early days of its establishment, regards this as a concept that encompasses ideas, value concepts, and assumptions that are of both a cultural and political nature. Since Aksoy's study analyzes subject matter that is highly relevant to this current study in terms of its nature and

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5 André Lefevere, "That Structure in the Dialect of Men Interpreted", *Comparative Criticism* 6/87 (1984), 89, as cited in Theo Hermans, *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and Systemic Approaches Explained* (Manchester: St. Jerome Publ, 1999), 127.

6 Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, vii.

7 Christina Schaffner, "The Concept of Norms in Translation Studies", *Current Issues In Language and Society* 5/1-2 (January 1998), 5.

8 Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 12.

9 André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 14, as cited in Hermans, *Translation in Systems*, 126.

10 Berrin Aksoy, "Translation as Rewriting", *Translation Journal* (Accessed May 4 2024).

content, it is this description that includes the cultural aspect that will be assumed here.

As will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this study, the notion of translation as rewriting and the concepts of manipulation, patronage, patron, and ideology can be closely linked to the forces that were at play in the translation of the *azān*. The study will refer to these terms within said sections.

## 2.2. Norms

A good number of researchers have provided descriptions of the concept of norms. One such researcher is Gideon Toury, who defines norms as “performance instructions” that stem from the values and ideas of a given community and that indicate what is acceptable/unacceptable, appropriate/inappropriate, or tolerable/intolerable in certain settings.<sup>11</sup> Hermans<sup>12</sup>, on the other hand, underscores its collective nature and describes its function by stating that it mediates and facilitates the relationship not only between people but also between the individual and the collective. It essentially establishes a connection between the person’s values, expectations, and beliefs with that of the community, thus making its people less uncertain and more predictable. In other words, norms aim to establish unity in behavior based on a collection of common values, beliefs, and ideas.

Hinging upon this description, Hermans argues that successful interactions, translations included, are predicated on the coordination of the actions of the interactants involved.<sup>13</sup> In other words, their actions and, hence, the norms that govern said actions must be concordant with one another, or at the very least, must not conflict with each other. This misalignment of actions and norms on a large scale, as will be elaborated in the following sections of this study, can cause considerable issues for all parties involved in the interaction.

When it comes to translational norms, which can be argued to be dependent on the wider social and cultural norms that exist in the sphere where translations take place, Toury<sup>14</sup> makes the distinction between three kinds of norms: preliminary norms, initial norms, and operational norms. The first of these refers to the norms relevant to the selection of the text and general translation strategy. Initial norms refer to norms relevant to the choice to be either source text or target text-oriented. Finally, operational norms refer to norms that govern the choices made during the process of translation. Based on such

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11 Gideon Toury, “The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation”, *Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995), 1-320.

12 Theo Hermans, “Norms of Translation”, *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, ed. Carol A. Chapelle (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012), 1.

13 Hermans, “Norms of Translation”, 1.

14 Toury, “The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation”, 58.

descriptions, it is possible to make the assertion that such norms inform virtually all of the stages and processes of the act of translation, or at least they are expected to do so by the general public.

Having said that, it is entirely possible for translations to not comply with the norms of a given society and period. In fact, the assumption that all translations are carried out and created with full conformity to prevalent norms may be misleading, as it leaves no room for the very probable possibility of divergence of the text and/or translator. Such sentiments are echoed by Erkazancı in her study discussing a habitus-oriented approach to Elif Şafak's resistance toward Türkiye's language planning endeavors in its early Republican days.<sup>15</sup> Considering that habitus is regarded as norm-governed structures of perception and action,<sup>16</sup> she argues that claiming all translations take into consideration widely accepted norms and are conducted through one unwavering form of habitus may lead to a "deterministic view of habitus,"<sup>17</sup> rendering the choices within the act of translation invariable. It is important to take this into consideration when assessing the influence of norms in such cases of translation and reception.

Concerning translational norms, the primary focus of this study will be on the aforementioned preliminary norms, since the choice of text constitutes a significant part of the discussions to follow and on the wider norms of the general public that are expected to inform the act of translation. The study will refer to these norms during its subsequent discussions of the opposition the Turkish *azân* had faced.

### 3. The History of Islam in Turkish and Ottoman Culture

In order to better understand why this translation can be considered an act of rewriting and to better grasp the reasons behind the resistance to said translation, it would prove beneficial to look into the perceived significance of the *azân* in the Turkish culture, the historical context of said significance, and how the translation of the *azân* and the other reforms came to be. To do so, a brief history of the Ottoman Empire is in order.

Upon being established in 1299, the Ottoman Empire swiftly gained power and expanded its borders to a large geography, spanning the Middle East,

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15 Hilal Erkazancı, "A Habitus-Oriented Perspective on Resistance to Language Planning through Translation: A Case Study on the Turkish Translation of Elif Şafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul*", *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies* 26/3 (September 30 2014), 386.

16 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), 169-174.

17 Erkazancı, "A Habitus-Oriented Perspective on Resistance to Language Planning through Translation", 386.



Europe, Anatolia, and even Africa.<sup>18</sup> This powerful empire relied heavily on Islam and its principles in many aspects, particularly with regard to the lifestyles of its people, its governance, and state affairs. Having encountered and accepted Islam as their religion centuries before the Ottoman Empire was established,<sup>19</sup> Turks had long been accustomed to not only Islam but also the Islamic way of living and worship. Particularly in its prime, the empire was regarded by other nations as a Muslim force to reckon with, and, for many nations and peoples in the Muslim world, the representative of Islam. Additionally, starting from the 16th century the sultans assumed the role of the caliph, a title bestowed on the leaders of the Muslim community worldwide, and thus became “[...] a symbol of Muslim sovereignty in an age of European colonialism.”<sup>20</sup> Considering these aspects, it is safe to say that Islam held sway in the lives of its people.

In addition to this, primarily due to the role Islam played in the empire and also the fact that the nation’s borders encompassed large populations from the Middle East, Arabic was a common language among the empire’s vast collection of languages. Arabic was regarded as an esteemed language used commonly by intellectuals, along with Persian, and was primarily the language of sacred texts and high literature. The official language of the nation was Ottoman Turkish,<sup>21</sup> a language which stemmed from Arabic and Persian, particularly in terms of its writing system and vocabulary; in fact, the influence of these languages was so great that the modernized Turkish of today still owes a considerable portion of its vocabulary to Arabic.<sup>22</sup> Without a doubt, such circumstances indicate the significance Arabic held among the Ottomans.

The empire’s long period of prosperity was followed by a decline, and by the 1800s, it became apparent that it was in a structurally and economically vulnerable state.<sup>23</sup> In an effort to rejuvenate and modernize the empire, Ottoman officials started administering reforms. It comes as no surprise that these reforms emerged in approximately the same period that the Spring of Nations

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18 Stanford J. Shaw - Gökhan Çetinsaya, “Ottoman Empire”, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (Accessed April 26 2024).

19 Vahap Aktas, “Islamization of Anatolia and the Effects of Established Sufism (Orders)”, *The Anthropologist* 17/1 (January 2014), 147.

20 M. Brett Wilson, *Translating the Qur’an in an Age of Nationalism: Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014), 4.

21 Fuat Boyacıoğlu, “The Historical Development of the Foreign Language Education in Ottoman Empire”, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 174 (February 2015), 653.

22 Amy L. Jensen, *The Sociolinguistic Role of Ottoman Turkish and Arabic in Turkish Nationalism* (İstanbul: Sabancı University, 2018), 6.

23 Eve McPherson, “Political History and Embodied Identity Discourse in the Turkish Call to Prayer”, *Music and Politics* 5/1 (June 1 2011), 2.

occurred, as the main issues said reforms focused on were nationalism and national identity.<sup>24</sup> One major result of these endeavors was the attempt to “purify” the Turkish language of Arabic and Persian words to create an authentic language that they could call their own.<sup>25</sup> “For an empire seeking validation from Europe, the most pressing matter for the empire's top intellectuals was Ottoman Turkish's heavy orthographical and grammatical dependence on Arabic and Persian.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, nationalist intellectuals and officials started endorsing the establishment and use of a “purely Turkish” language. In the meantime, they also took France as an example for many of its reforms, thereby entailing the adoption of French loanwords in Turkish. A number of prominent nationalist figures also suggested changing the writing system, with some scholars even arguing that, “the Arabic alphabet was not sufficient to truly express Turkish phonology.”<sup>27</sup> However, this was met with severe opposition from religious conservatives, as they believed the Arabic writing system to be sacred.<sup>28</sup> These linguistic reforms, therefore, were rendered restricted to attempts to reduce the use of Arabic and Persian words, which were, in any case, not very effective during this period.

The outbreak of World War I was the final nail in the coffin of the empire. Siding with the Central Powers, the Turkish nation was met with devastating defeat, which resulted in the fall of the empire, leaving its people to fend for themselves against invading powers. In this time of chaos and havoc, the Turkish folk united under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a military commander who was later to become the first president of the Turkish Republic, to create a Turkish force that could fight against the invaders in what was later called the Turkish War of Independence.<sup>29</sup> At the end of the war, the Turks came out victorious yet in shambles. With no ruling power to help them recover from the war, fear and chaos spread among the people. Amidst the panic, Atatürk, who was regarded as a national hero after his many victories in war, initiated preparations to establish a modern nation that would take Western civilizations and their administrations, constitutions, law codes, languages, and lifestyles as its model, which can be considered a continuation of the modernization processes initiated during the Tanzimat period.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the

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24 Shaw - Çetinsaya, “Ottoman Empire”.

25 McPherson, “Political History and Embodied Identity Discourse in the Turkish Call to Prayer”, 2.

26 Jensen, *The Sociolinguistic Role of Ottoman Turkish and Arabic in Turkish Nationalism*, 4.

27 Jensen, *The Sociolinguistic Role of Ottoman Turkish and Arabic in Turkish Nationalism*, 5-6.

28 Musa Aksoy, “Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Türkçenin Geçirdiği Aşamalar”, *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları* 99/197 (2012), 175.

29 Shaw - Çetinsaya, “Ottoman Empire”.

30 Nezihe Yaşar - Uğur Yasin Asal, “Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e Geçişte Modernleşmede Yaşanan Değişim ve Süreklilikler”, *İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 21/43 (June 15 2022), 611-614.

Republic of Türkiye was founded in 1923 with Atatürk as its president, opening a brand-new page in the history of Turkish people.

#### 4. The Reforms of the Republican Era

To be able to contextualize the translation of the *azān*, it would help to discuss the matter against the backdrop of other reforms that took place in the said period, as well as within the scope of the restoration and revolution Türkiye was going through as a whole. For this reason, exploring the progression of these reforms will prove beneficial.

During this new era, the ultimate objective Atatürk and the Turkish state strived to achieve was modernizing the nation and constructing a unified national and cultural identity that aligned with contemporary Western ideals.<sup>31</sup> The collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the multi-ethnic heritage that was left behind, the people's heavy dependence on the Middle Eastern roots of Islam, the political and societal chaos induced by the War of Independence,<sup>32</sup> and efforts to implement Turkish nationalism in the administration of the new state were all factors that played a part in the reforms that were to be gradually carried out in this period. The new state took Europe as a model for modernization and accordingly endeavored to shape the Turkish state, its people's way of living, and its culture in a way that would fit the image of a Western-oriented nation. Consequently, Atatürk sought to introduce secularism into the new administration since the new state's purpose was to establish a new identity that would unify its people based on a shared culture, language, and history.<sup>33</sup> In parallel with such endeavors, it also aimed to nationalize Islam by replacing its Arabic elements, which is most notably the language it is practiced in, with that of authentically Turkish ones, as it seemed that it was these foreign elements that impeded their national identity.<sup>34</sup>

Since language can be deemed a significant symbol of national identity, linguistic reforms held great importance in the government's plans to redefine Türkiye's national identity. The linguistic reforms can be deemed to consist of two main stages: the alphabet reform which initiated the Turkish language's

31 Murat Alakel, "İlk Dönem Cumhuriyet Türkiye'si Ulus İnşası Sürecinde Milliyetçilik ve Sivil-Etnik İkilemine Dair Teorik Tartışmalar", *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 5/9 (2011), 21.

32 Özer İlbeyi, "Mütareke ve İşgal Yıllarında Osmanlı Devletinde Görülen Sosyal Çöküntü ve Toplumsal Yaşam", *OTAM Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma Ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi* 14 (2003), 269-270.

33 Şehnaz Tahir Gürçağlar, *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 93.

34 Umut Azak, "Secularism in Turkey as a Nationalist Search for Vernacular Islam: The Ban on the Call to Prayer in Arabic (1932-1950)", *Revue Des Mondes Musulmans et de La Méditerranée* 124 (November 28 2008), 169.

transition from the Arabic writing system to the Latin alphabet, and the ventures into the language's lexicology, which can be broadly named 'The Language Revolution.' The change in writing systems was not an easy transition. After taking effect in 1928, the majority of the Turkish literate population was rendered illiterate overnight. This, however, was a price the government was willing to pay since, as Jensen mentions in her dissertation, from the perspective of the Turkish government, as a new republic aiming to become part of modern Europe, "[...] Ottoman Turkish screamed orient by its use of the same writing system as the Qur'an, the holy book of a religion that had been historically hailed as the antithesis of Western thought and ideology."<sup>35</sup> Hence, the orthographical reform was seen as an integral stage in the path to Westernization.

This change was followed by a reform concerning the language's lexis. This aspect of the language reforms can be deemed to have its roots predominantly in the Tanzimat era preceding the Republican era, which witnessed the rise of advocacy for a "purified" and Turkified Ottoman Turkish.<sup>36</sup> The new Republican state institutionalized these efforts by establishing societies, committees, and associations that aimed to nationalize the Turkish language, the most predominant of which was the Turkish Language Association founded in 1932 and is in operation to this day.<sup>37</sup> Although its active role in linguistic reforms has become subdued following the transition to the multi-party era,<sup>38</sup> the association's primary objective in its early days was to come up with Turkish equivalents for the Arabic and Persian words that were currently in use and promote the use of such authentic expressions while discouraging the use of Middle Eastern lexis.<sup>39</sup>

Similar trends of modernization and Westernization could also be observed in Ottoman literature, which manifested in approximately the same period. The young literature of this newly founded nation also seemed to require modernization to facilitate the creation of national and modern cultural values the Turks could call their own. The period's Western-oriented approach to literature led to immense translation efforts, solidified through the establishment of the state-owned Translation Bureau which endorsed the translation of Western humanist classics in an effort to enrich the Turkish cultural repertoire and transfer Western ideals into Türkiye.<sup>40</sup> This was deemed an essential process in not only the uprooting of the influence Arabic and Persian had over

35 Jensen, *The Sociolinguistic Role of Ottoman Turkish and Arabic in Turkish Nationalism*, 6.

36 Tahir Gürçağlar, *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960*, 52.

37 Türk Dil Kurumu (TDK), "Tarihçe" (Accessed May 15 2024).

38 Tahir Gürçağlar, *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960*, 88.

39 Yılmaz Çolak, "Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey", *Middle Eastern Studies* 40/6 (November 2004), 67, 76.

40 Tahir Gürçağlar, *The Politics and Poetics of Translation in Turkey, 1923-1960*, 108.

Turkish literature and culture, but also in the constitution of a Turkish literature that was accessible to the public (contrary to Ottoman high literature) and a national culture that represented its people.<sup>41</sup>

These reforms laid the foundations for the religious reforms that followed, which included the translation of the *azān*. It could be argued that they had deemed it essential to nationalize the people's religion as well in order to re-define their national and cultural identity, as it formed an intrinsic part of their current identity. According to McPherson, one of the greatest reasons the *azān* was chosen was because of the medium it was presented in: "It was the public auditory space that the call occupied which made it such a target for reform."<sup>42</sup> Considering that it was also broadcast 5 times a day, it would make an efficient tool in their promotion of nationalization. It was most likely regarded as an important religious symbol that had to be vernacularized.

The translation process took place under the supervision of and with suggestions from Atatürk himself. He had called upon nine Qur'an reciters who were of *hafiz* status, an Arabic title given to people who have memorized the Qur'an, to translate it into Turkish. After achieving a satisfactory translation, the first vernacular call to prayer was broadcast at the beginning of 1932 at the distinguished Hagia Sophia Mosque. At the end of 1932, public reciters of the call to prayer across the nation were officially ordered to broadcast the Turkish translation approved by Atatürk,<sup>43</sup> and in 1941, the Arabic call to prayer was banned altogether. The Turkish call to prayer stayed in practice for 17 years.<sup>44</sup>

The fact that the first national call to prayer was chosen to be broadcast in the Hagia Sophia Mosque also bears great significance and symbolism. Ownership of the historic Hagia Sophia has changed multiple times throughout its long history. This structure was first built in the 6th century as a church by the Byzantine Empire which ruled over Constantinople during the period. Despite numerous collapses, it served as a cathedral for centuries until the city was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1453. It was then converted into a grand mosque with additions made to the structure to render it more suitable for Islamic belief, and in 1935 under the rule of Atatürk it was turned into a museum.<sup>45</sup> This structure held and continues to hold great significance for the Turks as it is perceived to symbolize the victory of the Muslim Turks

41 Aksoy, "Translation as Rewriting".

42 McPherson, "Political History and Embodied Identity Discourse in the Turkish Call to Prayer", 5.

43 McPherson, "Political History and Embodied Identity Discourse in the Turkish Call to Prayer", 5-7.

44 Jensen, *The Sociolinguistic Role of Ottoman Turkish and Arabic in Turkish Nationalism*, 37-38.

45 The Editors of Encyclopedia, "Hagia Sophia", *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Accessed April 26 2024).

over the Christian Byzantines. Therefore, it was no coincidence that the first Turkish call to prayer was broadcast from this historic and symbolic structure. It could be argued that by doing so, Atatürk was proclaiming a modernist Republican conquest of the previous Middle Eastern ideologies.<sup>46</sup>

The field of religious practices was another area the officials were seeking to modernize through reformation. Among these practices, the daily prayers were of great interest to them as they are practiced five times a day by Muslims who choose to practice their belief; they, therefore, consistently occupy a large portion of the daily lives of practicing Muslims. During the prayers, verses from the Qur'an are recited, making this religious practice a very sensitive case in terms of translation due to its direct relation to the Qur'an, which is regarded as the most divine and inimitable text in Islam. This translation of the prayers themselves came after the first broadcast of the Turkish *azān*.<sup>47</sup> The fact that the same period also saw the holy Qur'an itself being translated in order to make it available to people who didn't speak Arabic<sup>48</sup> may have also contributed to the efforts to nationalize the daily prayers.

The foundations of this reform were most likely set in the Tanzimat era, as Western examples of reformation at the time consisted of Martin Luther's translation of the Bible and attempts to rationalize religion.<sup>49</sup> This idea was also advocated by Ziya Gökalp, a pioneering Turkish nationalist writer and poet of the era. He was passionate in his endeavors to support the practice of rituals and sacred texts in the vernacular, maintaining that this would enable a better understanding of the essence and core of the religion for everyone.<sup>50</sup>

## 5. The Translation of the *Azān* as Rewriting

To be able to contextualize the translation of the *azān* as rewriting, it would help to frame this translation phenomenon within Lefevere's concepts related to rewriting, the first of which is patronage. Within this scenario, much like in most of the other modernization and nationalization attempts observed within this period, it was the state that had wielded the forces of patronage. By initiating, supervising, and distributing the translations it deemed appropriate for the ideology of the time, the state and its officials had taken the role of the patron that manipulated the translation process as well as the processes that came before and after it, to rewrite not only the call to prayer but also

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46 McPherson, "Political History and Embodied Identity Discourse in the Turkish Call to Prayer", 7.

47 McPherson, "Political History and Embodied Identity Discourse in the Turkish Call to Prayer", 7.

48 Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an in an Age of Nationalism*, 11.

49 Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an in an Age of Nationalism*, 7.

50 Azak, "Secularism in Turkey as a Nationalist Search for Vernacular Islam", 165.

other religious, cultural, and social aspects of the Turkish people's lives under broader planning efforts.

In this case, the act of manipulation is particularly remarkable in regard to the choice of text and the way in which the translation was distributed. As mentioned earlier, the *azān* occupied the auditory space of the country five times a day; additionally, it was recited in Arabic, which had historically held an important place in the Muslim community's daily lives and the practices of their Islamic belief. Translating the *azān* would have had immense impacts on the people in terms of weakening their ties with Arabic and enforcing a vernacular version of the religion. The official order to recite the *azān* in Turkish across the nation also holds significance, as it demonstrates the state-induced regulation of its distribution, which is another signifier of manipulation within the context of rewriting.

Another concept that can be addressed here is that of ideology. Although Lefevere's concept of rewriting places emphasis on poetics and the manipulation of the literary systems,<sup>51</sup> the translation of the *azān* relates more so to the state ideology of the time and the rewriting of the people's national and cultural identity. For this reason, the emphasis here will solely be placed on the concept of ideology. Within this case, ideology consists of two aspects: political and cultural. That is to say, the state pursued goals within both the political and cultural realms, all of which were essentially tied to the Western-oriented approach they assumed in that period. Their goals were to constitute a state that aligned with the West's modern nations and to rewrite the values, ideas, ideals, conventions, lifestyles, and beliefs of its people based on Western ones. It can be claimed that these ideologies governed the state's attempts at manipulation and rewriting.

All in all, the translation of the *azān* clearly goes beyond a simple interlingual transfer of a text. Taking into consideration all the linguistic, literary, and religious reforms above, it is possible to regard the translation of the *azān* as part of a grander plan to rewrite virtually all aspects of the national and cultural identity of Turks. All these attempts combined to constitute nation-wide endeavors to manipulate the then-current image and functioning of the nation and its people, which at the time was heavily oriented towards the Middle East, in an attempt to nationalize them. In other words, the purpose was to create a cultural renaissance and to instigate extensive modernization processes in a young nation through rewriting.<sup>52</sup>

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51 Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 2017, vii.

52 Aksoy, "Translation as Rewriting".

## 6. Its Reception and the Influence of Norms

For a nation accustomed to Muslim worship and the Middle Eastern cultural and linguistic heritage that had come along with it, transitioning into a secularist regime and vernacular religion from which Arabic elements were extracted was no easy feat. For many, particularly after the shock of the change in the writing system, this was regarded not only as a jarring shift but also an utterly heinous act committed by Western forces. The secularization of the administration, the adoption of Western ideals of modernization and nationalization, the linguistic reforms, and finally, the religious reforms all combined to spread fear and devastation among a large portion of the nation's Muslim community. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that these reforms were promptly met with severe opposition.

One prominent instance of opposition took the form of an uprising that took place in 1933, shortly after the first Turkish call to prayer was broadcast. It was initiated at the Grand Mosque of Bursa, a renowned mosque that symbolized Ottoman rule for many, by a civilian reciting the *azān*, who chose to recite the Arabic version of the *azān* rather than the translated one.<sup>53</sup> He was promptly arrested afterward, which later triggered a riot in Bursa. As a result, many were arrested and subjected to prison sentences, while several officials were removed from their positions.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned in Umut Azak's article, this was only one of many riots to come.<sup>55</sup>

The translation of the call to prayer was regarded as nothing short of a disaster for many. From the perspective of the Muslim community, this was an attack on the sacred language of Islam and, therefore, the religion itself as well. Although not a part of the Qur'an, the *azān* was directly linked with the daily prayers and held great importance in their daily lives. Now, with the *azān* being recited in Turkish, "[...] the populace of Türkiye experienced a public five-times-daily reminder that the secular nation now took precedence over previous allegiances and more than a millennium of practice."<sup>56</sup> They felt that the government was attempting to get rid of Islam altogether.

Similarly, the translation of the prayer itself was also met with unrest and opposition.<sup>57</sup> As mentioned earlier, practicing prayers in Turkish would mean reciting verses from the Qur'an in a language other than its original. The mat-

53 Ali Dikici, "İbadet Dilinin Türkçeleştirilmesi Bağlamında Türkçe Ezan Denemesi ve Buna Gösterilen Tepkiler", *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları* 10 (2012), 84-85.

54 Jensen, *The Sociolinguistic Role of Ottoman Turkish and Arabic in Turkish Nationalism*, 38.

55 Azak, "Secularism in Turkey as a Nationalist Search for Vernacular Islam", 174.

56 McPherson, "Political History and Embodied Identity Discourse in the Turkish Call to Prayer", 1.

57 Dikici, "İbadet Dilinin Türkçeleştirilmesi Bağlamında Türkçe Ezan Denemesi ve Buna Gösterilen Tepkiler", 80.



ter of translating the Holy Qur'an has been a topic of heated debate for centuries in Muslim communities worldwide. The "untranslatability" of the Qur'an is partly the reason why the vernacular daily prayers were strongly opposed, yet the reasons behind its untranslatability are numerous. To not stray too far from the subject of the *azān*, these will be touched upon only briefly. One major reason is that the Qur'an is perceived by Muslims as the direct word of God.<sup>58</sup> From this perspective, translating it or even attempting to imitate it in another language would mean changing and thereby tarnishing the word of God. Another reason is that Qur'an translations run the risk of misinterpretation and mistranslations since "translation is a human endeavor, and as such, it is open to the possibility of human error."<sup>59</sup>

All of these perceptions and sentiments point to a disagreement between the oppositionist's norms and the ideology implemented through the patronage of the period. Taking into consideration the people's history with Islam, the significance many have attributed to it, and how accustomed they are to practicing it and being exposed to it in its Arabic form, it can be argued that this community's values, ideals, expectations, and beliefs, or in other words, their norms were shaped by these elements. Based on these norms, they would expect to continue practicing their religion in its Arabic form and to continue living the way they had for centuries. It would be safe to argue that the Muslim community's norms dictated that these translations were not acceptable. These norms, which would have been expected to regulate successful interactions between individuals, institutions, and the public as a whole, had started to contrast with the ideals of the new state, thus leading to conflict.

Considering that the translators, in this case, did not play a big part in the translation choices due to the fact that it was the state that initiated the act and regulated the processes that followed, not much room is left for the discussion of translational norms. That being said, it is possible to touch upon what Toury deems preliminary norms, as it is concerned with the choice of text.<sup>60</sup> Under normal circumstances, it would be expected that the choice regarding the text to be translated would be governed by the norms of the people. As the initiator, it was the state that chose the *azān* for its ideological purposes; it is this conscious decision to translate the *azān* that constitutes the preliminary norm in this translation process.

To summarize, as the state continued to enforce more and more reforms, the rift between the state's ideology implemented through patronage and the Muslim community's normative expectations during that period grew wider

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58 Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an in an Age of Nationalism*, 12.

59 Jensen, *The Sociolinguistic Role of Ottoman Turkish and Arabic in Turkish Nationalism*, 53.

60 Toury, "The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation", 58.

and wider. One can argue that it was this widening rift that led to the resistance and the riots that followed.

## Conclusion

This research has endeavored to study whether the Turkish translation of the *azān* in the early days of the republic of Türkiye can be reconsidered as an act of rewriting and whether the negative reception it had received can be explained with reference to the people's norms. The study was conducted as a case study with particular emphasis placed on the historical and cultural contexts of the Turkish translation of the *azān* and the opposition directed towards it.

Considering the totality of the reforms implemented during the early days of the nation and the ideology demonstrated by the state, the translation of the *azān* can be deemed a rewriting phenomenon that aimed to manipulate the translation processes in an effort to redefine the Turkish national and cultural identity. Its negative reception, on the other hand, was discussed with reference to the Muslim community's norms. Based on the historical significance of and the community's dependence on Islam and its rituals in nearly all aspects of their lives, it can be argued that the values and ideas constituting their norms and their perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors that hinge upon such norms were greatly influenced by such elements. It can be argued that it was due to this misalignment of the ideology reinforced by the patronage and the normative expectations of the Muslim community that led to the opposition directed to the translation of the *azān*.

One further research that may be suggested is a reception study that retains this study's theoretical framework but delves deeper into how the Turkish *azān* was perceived and received by the people with reference to official records such as statements in newspaper articles and journals that demonstrate the reception of the translation. This study was unable to include these elements due to space restrictions, but such a comprehensive study may provide a better understanding of the basis of the opposition towards and, at times, even the rejection of the Turkish *azān*.

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## Nationalizing a Nation by Vernacularizing its Religion: The Translation of the Azân from the Perspective of Rewriting and Norms

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Bu araştırma için herhangi bir kamu kuruluşundan, kâr amacı gütmeyen veya özel sektörlerden hibe alınmamıştır.

#### Etik Onay ve Katılımcı Rızası

“Nationalizing a Nation by Vernacularizing its Religion: The Translation of the Azân from the Perspective of Rewriting and Norms” başlıklı çalışmanın yazım sürecinde bilimsel etik ve alıntı kurallarına uyulmuş olup toplanan veriler üzerinde hiçbir tahrifat yapılmamıştır. Herhangi bir etik ihlalle karşılaşılması durumunda *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*'nin yükümlülüğü olmayıp tüm sorumluluk yazarlara aittir.