Pax Ottomanica: Philosophical Background of the Millet System

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Öz

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı Osmanlı millet sisteminin muhtemel felsefi kaynaklarına işaret etmektir. Bu amaçla ilk olarak millet sisteminin önemli bir bileşeni olan ortak kimlik kavramını gözden geçirerek "Pax Ottomanica" ifadesi ile ne kastedildiğini açıklayacağım. Daha sonra kimlik kavramının çeşitli kullanımları üzerinde durarak bu çalışmanın kapsamı içerisinde yer alan temel kavramların değişik kullanım biçimlerine değineceğim. Son olarak Osmanlı millet sisteminin İslam felsefesi bağlamındaki muhtemel nazari kaynaklarını ve bunun uygulamadaki bazı tezahürlerini inceleyeceğim. Fârâbî ve İbn Bâcce'nin siyaset felsefesine ilişkin teorilerinin bazı yönleri Osmanlı millet sisteminin âmelî boyutu ile büyük paralellik arz ettiğinden, söz konusu teorilerin millet sistemi için teorik bir arka plan oluşturduğu söylenebilir. Özellikle de millet sisteminin dini kimlikleri korumak amacıyla onları birbirinden belirli ölçüde ayrıştırmayı esas aldığı göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, Fârâbî ve İbn Bâcce'nin benzer bir yaklaşımı esas alan erdemli toplum eksenli siyaset felsefesinin bu sistemin teorik arka planını inşa etmek için kullanıldığı söylenebilir.

Abstract

This study aims to shed light on the philosophical background of the Ottoman millet system. First, I will review the nature of collective identity to establish a basis for further identity-related discussions and define the term of "Pax Ottomanica". Then I will explain diverse and complicated utilizations of identity to clarify the scope of the key concepts of this article. Finally, I will identify the theoretical sources of Ottoman millet system within Islamic philosophy and show how it affected practical implementation. Since al-Fārābī and Ibn Bajjah political theory has reflected theoretical approaches to governance that closely parallel the practical usage of Ottoman millet system I will argue that these approaches can reasonably be considered inspirational sources and justifications for the millet system. Especially considering that the millet system maintained a policy of the protection of religious identities through detachment, I conclude that al-Fārābī's and Ibn Bajjah's political theories were highly influential in shaping the practical implementation of the millet system.

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I.   The Nature of Identity and Pax Ottomanica

"Identity" is a keyword for modern social sciences and a significant focus of sociological theory and study. From the earliest historical moments, identity has been a concern; in many pre-modern, stable societies, identity was, to a great extent, assigned, rather than chosen or adopted. In most contemporary societies, however, the concept of identity carries the full burden of the demand for an awareness of that who one is. Nevertheless, identity is not an easy social instrument to develop, and maintaining a certain identity in the times of uncertainty is demanding. The tremendous pace of change in social contexts, groups and networks in which people and their identities are rooted, create an ever-growing turmoil in social regulations. Furthermore, the collective structures and networks in which the individual identities and practical manuals for those individuals are embedded are becoming more and more vague, which in turn generates bigger challenges for every committed identity.

These challenges to identity formation (and many more) in the chaotic social structures that characterize modern societies may create a misimpression about identity: one may assume that identities have always been so interactive or interconnected. In reality, there have been times when different identities were somewhat insulated and isolated from each other. This was not necessarily due to geographical or physical obstacles. Rather, it sometimes resulted, as in the case of the Ottoman Millet system, from political and social measures taken by states to sustain a peaceful and nonviolent. As much as the millet system aimed to maintain a level of freedom, it also required a level of isolation between different identities. That isolation, as I will explain in detail, was not a social or religious apartheid. Because it provided a degree of plurality and co-existence in different echelons of social life, the millet system ultimately did not lead to the emergence of ghettos or xenophobia. However, in order to preserve the identities of religious groups in the millet system, some autonomy was necessarily lost.

The "Pax Ottomanica", of which the millet system was a key component, differed from its closest historical parallel, the Pax Romana in several respects. First, Pax Romana was preserved only in the face of great difficulties and it hardly signified a nonaggressive epoch for non-Romans. For example, a Caledonian war leader would tell his men about Romans that "To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a desolation and call it peace." (Tacitus,

1894: 34). Second, the Romans were never interested in the opinions or rights of any subject nation or minority. Of course, for them, it was imperative to act righteously and with *fides*, but it was not due to a reciprocal respect for their subjects. Acting on *fides* was the right thing to do simply in order to maintain a proper relationship with the gods, not because others had rights. The thoughts of foreigners mattered only to the degree that they made it easier or harder for the Romans to attain their goals (Goldsworthy, 2016: 357). Thirdly, the Roman elite was always ready to take up occasions for war and applying brutal means of violence was no concern for any Roman Principate. There was a regular incentive for a commander to pick a fight with a tribe in the anticipation of winning booty and a victory. Therefore, Rome was neither shy nor hesitant to maintain Pax Romana by regular and persistent military intimidation (Rich, 2002: 80-89).

II. The Problem of Definition

Rival definitions of identity are often inconsistent and contradictory. However, we can identify some common patterns of usage. Key uses of identity across various disciplines include:

• a dynamic force behind religious, social or political action;

• a shared phenomenon of resemblance among different entities;

• an essential and principal aspect of individual and social presence;

• a progression of collaborating construction of self or group mentality.

Each of these classifications of identity characterize different kinds of the actions, values, solidarity, and enmity which individuals or groups may exhibit. However, each definition places value on a different aspect of the term identity (Brubaker, Rogers and Cooper, 2000: 8-10). The first conceptualization of identity listed above, is the subtle [foundation?] upon which social and religious activities are built. In a sense, those activities are the corporeal representation of the values and self-understanding which are preserved by identity. Therefore, the values and understandings which establish an identity are, to a certain degree, expected to be philosophically and logically consistent. Thus, despite its internal clashes, the first definition given above considers individual and collective identities to be a robust impetus for social and political action (Burke, 1980, 1989; Burke and Tully, 1977).

The second, third and fourth definitions of identity given above are mostly concerned with group identity. The essential principle of social identity theory (SIT) is that persons express their identities in two different categories: social identity, which is determined by association with different communal groups, and individual identity, which is rooted in the unique features that differentiate a person from other members of same group or associates. Social and personal identities are considered to be virtually inseparable: Social identity offers eminence and improves self-respect. Since individuals are interested in assessing themselves positively, they incline to appraise positively those groups to which they belong and to discriminate against groups they perceive to pose a threat to their social identity (Howard, 2000: 368-369).

Collective identity is a concept grounded in classic sociological constructs: Durkheim's "collective conscience," Marx's "class consciousness," Weber's "Verstehen", and Tonnies' "Gemeinschaft". So rooted, the notion addresses the "we-ness" of a group, stressing the similarities or shared attributes around which group members coalesce (Cerulo, 1997: 386). Thus, confirmation of the resemblance in a certain and consistent level or cohesion of a group of people is another use of identity. In this form of identity, social undercurrents strengthen and contribute to the impact of identification, based upon internal or external agents in force. The collectivity, which is attributed to identity within this definition, presumes that individuals or groups who have similar self-conceptions hold shared "nature and awareness". These collective qualities or considerations are projected to contribute to the harmony of people and the consistency of their actions. Moreover, as a collective phenomenon, the inclusive solidarity and exclusivity of strangers are expected to overcome certain challenges and in turn to protect the individuals who commit to the same identity. Especially, as conceptualized by Ibn Khaldun, sometimes the only protection against a hostile entity is provided by group identity. "This means that one cannot imagine any hostile act being undertaken against anyone who has his group feeling (*asabiyya*) to support him" (Ibn Khaldun, 1981: 97)

The relationship between individual existence and group identity is obscure. Despite the fact that the features of the connection have continued to be ambiguous, it has always been acknowledged that identities function within a social structure. In other words, it is safe to assume that identities occur only in societies or through associations,

which delineate and establish them. Thus, the quest to understand identity includes the problem of what is the appropriate relationship of the individual to society as a habitus (Grotevant and others, 2000: 382). Since identity standards originate in the societal expectations that are held for a person who occupies a particular position in the social structure, one attains an identity standard by committing to the established expectations for a person in a particular position (Eisenstadt, and Giesen 1995: 75-80). In this framework, an identity is viewed as a set of self-relevant meanings which are suggested as certain guidelines for a particular individual (Burke 1980, 1991; Burke and Tully 1977). For the role identity of the father, for instance, the norm might include what it means to be a husband or a protector. For each identity, there is a standard that specifies the degree of commitment to the role, which defines the individual's identity: what it defines to be who one is (Burke, 2006: 85).

III. Religious Identity and Interaction

The millet system was an Ottoman structure to regulate religious identities and their interactions in the social domain. Consequently, understanding the dynamics of religious identity and its interactions is crucial to understanding how the millet system functioned. Religious identity has been a vital element in regulating social interaction both in the modern and the pre-modern eras. But how to describe it? Exploring the nature of divine devotion might be a good starting point. Countless human activities and interactions, religious or otherwise, are related to an attempt to search for meaning and, contrary to some oversimplified assumptions, human acts are not reducible to a maximizing of interests (Ammerman, 2006: 226-227). Religious identity can be described as the means by which accumulated religious values are inherited, guidelines of moral action are formed and idioms of religious culture are constructed. In thinking of religious identity as a social element, a meaningful preliminary point would be appreciation of the steady and robust cultural metaphors via which those identities are reflected. Further, we also need to remember that many products of human inspiration, cultural creativity, and artifacts are inspired by religious identity which was an indispensable part of self in a traditional society.

By adopting the behavioral code of a certain group, the individual feels that he/she has been recognized and acknowledged to be a social agent which entails a social position. Therefore, when a person

ascribes to himself or herself the positional designations and behaves with others as expected, he or she can be said to have taken on a set of identities. (Linton, 1936; Merton, 1957). This is a key point to understand in the case of religious identity. Since religion as a practical phenomenon often entails diverse and complex rules of behavior, it requires commitment, devotion, and adaptation to an everlasting march of transformations. Thus, if a person recognizes who he or she is in the sense of religious identity, then he or she knows how to behave in the communal sphere. In other words, in pre-modern times, identity in the religious sense provided determination, values, directions, and vision. The greater the commitment to the identity, the deeper one's sense of purposeful, resolute existence. Thus, if one did not have an idea about who one was in the communal sense, or misplaced his/her identity (religious identity in our case), then one basically could not comprehend how to survive in the social domain. In this case, the individual was likely to experience a devastating sense of anxiety or depression, and severely disordered behaviors (Thoits, 1983: 175).

Another aspect of religious identity that is relevant to the millet system is religious symbolism. Since religion, from one perspective, can be understood as a cluster of symbols, symbols and symbolic action must be taken into account in any attempt to understand religious identity. The essential principle of symbolic interaction is that individuals ascribe symbolic importance to items, clothes, actions, places, and dates, and then foster and convey these symbolic implications through social interaction. Especially before modern times, when symbols were in the center of social life, people approached objects not simply as material assets, but as carriers of meaning. For example, a certain dress code did not imply the individual's taste in fashion or style but manifested symbolic meaning in the social realm. Because religious meanings and symbols articulated through interaction, they played a central part in shaping identity. In turn, identities manifested themselves through symbols whose implications varied across participants and circumstances. Therefore, as Eliade argued, there is a reciprocal relationship between religious identity and symbols (Eliade, 1961).

Representation of a religion as a united, organizationally outlined, and somewhat constant set of shared principles and practices is what gives religious identity an "understructure". This understructure also provides an operational basis for social interaction. Understanding religious interaction, therefore, also means comprehending the intricate processes by which religious identities, religious boundaries, and reli-

gious differentiations were formed. This is also where religious identi-
ty starts to operate as a set of measures to protect certain cultural and
traditional values. For example, for members of religious minorities,
religious identity is evoked to provide a shield against any cultural or
religious peril. On the other hand, to distinguish themselves from oth-
ers, religious groups also must "state" their identities and announce
their uniqueness in the way they are (Goffman, 1959, 1969; McCall,
1978). The simplest way to do this is to engage in social conventions
which stress their symbolic locus in the world. This may be specifically
accurate among religious minorities whose members are close to each
other in a society where status differences between distant groups are
self-exemplifying (Hermanowicz and Morgan, 1999). Thus, religion
gradually (in some cases swiftly) assumes greater significance for mi-
norities' characterization of self and group relationships than their
historical position, where religious identity might have been taken for
granted or at least been of slighter significance. This is especially accu-
rate if the minority is descendent of a civilization in which they were
the majority, then conquered by another religious group and became a
religious minority (Peek, 2005: 218).

Another closely related explanation for why religion may become
a significant source for identity emphasizes the functional role of re-
ligion in society. Over and above meeting spiritual requirements, be-
longing to a religious group affords many non-religious rewards: emo-
tional, and social reimbursements, including communal links, finan-
cial opportunities, educational funds, and peer confidence and help
(Chen, 2002: 217-223; Hurh and Kim, 1990). As non-religious profits
increase, it becomes more likely that individuals will associate them-
selves with a religious identity.

A third account argues that religious identity and manifestation op-
erates to relieve the pressures produced by the majority's religious
identity (Feher, 1998), helping the individuals to defeat social pres-
sure as well. For example, some researches claim that when church af-
filiates describe themselves, firstly and principally in religious terms,
diverse groups come together to overcome social pressure (Sullivan,
2000: 143-145).

Another explanation claims that religion may be utilized to preserve
individual and social uniqueness in a multicultural context. Where re-
ligion is the most direct and the most significant element of division
in a multi-religious society, followers of any religion become more

aware of their religious identity and often more resolute in conveying those beliefs, principles, and behavioral codes. Especially where religious clothing, practices, and organizational associations serve as substantial identity markers that support promoting individual self-conscience and preserve group cohesion, even certain elements of ethnic and national legacy are demonstrated and maintained via religious identity (Peek, 2005: 218).

In short, for a variety of reasons, for many individuals, religion has been and still remains a critical unifying aspect in the pyramid of identities that create the self.

IV. Separation of Identities and Its Philosophical Background

In the first part of this article, we established that identity is vital for every human being in a traditional society. Furthermore, for every member of any community, identity becomes a means of self-expression. Since a community can be reduced to its own members, it is reasonable to suppose isolating the members of a community can be a means to protect the authenticity of each identity. Consequently, although it is not sensible to suppose that in a diverse society impenetrable barriers can be built, one role of the Ottoman legal system was to prevent or inhibit identity duplications and character imitations that might blur the identity boundaries of different religious communities.

One of the purposes of this separation of identities was to protect and guarantee the authenticity of Muslim identity in a multi-religious society. The basic tool to regulate social life in this sense was the millet system. Multiple studies have pointed out the tolerant and pluralist character of this system. Most of these studies emphasize, rather accurately, the remarkable tolerance of the millet system and how it helped different religious communities in the society to epitomize their own identity and culture. For example, in her *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era*, Julia Phillips Cohen studies Sephardi Jewish elites' success at adaptation into the imperial order in the Ottoman Empire and argues that this success was mostly was due to the millet system (Phillips, 2014, i-xxi). Similarly, Barkey attributes the first few Ottoman centuries of relatively peaceful interreligious and interethnic living, to the millet system (Barkey, 2008). This system was ultimately all-encompassing as it grouped all the people of the same religion despite their differences. Established as one of the essential administrative elements of the empire, the millet system offered non-Muslim communities the opportunity to promote the

awareness of identity and belonging to the community and to protect their own culture, customs, habits and religion while operating within the framework of the Empire (Shaw, 1976: 151-153; Karpat, 1982).

Although the abovementioned accounts successfully identify the tolerant dimensions of the millet system and are therefore an important corrective to unsubstantiated critiques (Braude, 1982, 69-88; Bat Ye'or, 1985), they fail to sufficiently account for the separation of communal identities. Moreover none of them adequately sheds light on the theoretical underpinnings of the millet system. In the Islamic legal tradition multiple terms are used to refer to non-Muslim communities. For example, a well established term inherited by the Ottomans to refer to the believers in the monotheistic faiths who remain at peace within the Muslims society and recognize Muslim's political authority over themselves was *ahl al-dhimma* (literally "the people of the contract"; singular *dhimmi*). Similarly, the term *ahl al-jizya*, refers to the tax payments made by non-Muslims to guarantee their rights to property, livelihood, and freedom of worship was already in the literature. Both terms were broadly used to designate ideal relations of the state with non-Muslim monotheists in the Rashidun Caliphate and Abbasid era (Masters, 2004: 18-26; Cardhi, 1955: 334-349). Building on this conceptual heritage, the Ottomans developed a novel socio-political structure, the millet, to integrate all religious identities in the society more effectively. Two important inspirational sources for this system were al-Fārābī's political philosophy and Ibn Bajjah's ethics.

Unlike the Greek philosophical tradition, al-Fārābī's ultimate classification of communities is not based on their population or the scale of the city. Although he does classify cities based on their size and magnitude, his ultimate criterion for categorization is religion. He begins with the premise that individuals cannot achieve excellence and are ordained to attain those aims thru political association. This is because of the fact that every human being is relentlessly in need of the help of his equals in the providing of the essential necessities and his very survival. A virtuous man who lives in association with others from a corrupt city will be unable to pursue a truly human life. Yet, if he tries to live on his own, his life will be in danger and he will either die, or he will be deprived of perfection. For al-Fārābī, political interactions can be reduced either to the achievement of true happiness, or to some other opposing aim, such as fleshly pleasures or the pursuit of richness. Accordingly human communities can be classified as either virtuous cities, built upon virtuous associations, or non-vir-

tuous cities, built upon non-virtuous associations, in which misery, ig-
norance, and depravity (*fisq*) thrive (al-Fārābī, 1964: 87-107; Fakhry, 2002: 101-102). This is why a virtuous human being must dissociate himself from non-virtuous people and travel to another community, the virtuous city

The virtuous city, which the principal leader or Imām should gov-
ern, is characterized by al-Fārābī as the political structure necessary to accomplish humanity's crucial objective of happiness. In his thinking on virtuous governance, al-Fārābī begins with the analogy of physi-
cian, comparing the well-being of the soul with well-being of the body. He argues that the true ruler who successfully grasps how to organize a community based on the righteous principles, will act like a doctor, treating citizens in the way that the physician treats the patients. More specifically, the virtuous ruler provides the perfect conditions for his followers to attain the highest possible state of well-being. He will also take the necessary precaution to avoid any plague or disease to ensure the well-being of his followers. In defining what creates the health of the soul and that of the body, al-Fārābī asserts that the health of the soul resides in its ability to realize what is righteous, as well as in car-
rying out noble actions. As far as sickness is considered, a soul which inclines towards what is immoral and wicked as well as to carries out dreadful actions can be very well regarded to be sick. The strategy of juxtaposing the role of the physician to that of the ruler, insofar as the first cures bodies and the second cures souls, provides al-Fārābī with the occasion to proceed beyond the individual level while establishing a state of equilibrium between individual human beings and society (Butterworth, 2005: 276-278).

Individual residents of virtuous city are bonded together as a com-
munity of purpose, both theoretical and practical. Their determina-
tion and willingness to achieve happiness is so excessive, and the in-
centives for its pursuit so powerful, that they eventually start to feel as if they are one united soul and mind. This, of course, necessitates disciplining the vulgar needs to cooperate with and aid reason. When they abandon the lower carnal and lustful desires, abstract themselves from material accidents, they will ascend spiritually. Thus, reason will be able to perform its appropriate duty and also acquire the supreme arts and sciences. In this context, citizens of the virtuous city pursue, first and foremost, the knowledge of God and his attributes. The ex-
traordinary determination of the ruling elite and the citizens to learn these things, and to foster the virtuous forms of personality, will even-

tually lead to the emergence of noble behaviors proper for attaining happiness. (al-Fārābī, 1964: 87).

The natural adversaries of the virtuous city are (1) the ignorant city, (2) the wayward city (*dāllah*), (3) the depraved city (*fāsiqah*) and (4) the renegade city (*mubadallah*) (al-Fārābī, 1968-b: 131). Al-Fārābī further subdivides non-virtuous cities and gives a plenary account of their prominent features discretely. Of the all non-virtuous cities, the ignorant city is evidently the worst by far. The ignorant city's inhabitants were never introduced to the idea of true happiness. Since they have no preconception of the true happiness, even if they were eventually guided to happiness, they either would not appreciate it or would not consider it. Their understanding of happiness is limited to physical health, prosperity, material pleasures, freedom of worshiping personal desires and obsession of popularity and esteem. There are six different types of ignorant city: (i) city of necessity; (ii) city of wealth and richness; (iii) city of depravity; (iv) city of honor; (v) city of power; and (vi) city of democracy. The city of necessity is the city whose inhabitants collaborate to provide very basic resources such as sustenance, clothes, accommodation. Therefore, citizens of this city confine their aim to the very basic needs of life. The inhabitants of city of wealth and richness, however, regard prosperity as the only ambition of life. The people of the city of depravity are so corrupt that they prefer food, drink, sexual intercourse and similar vulgar pleasures over any other aspirations. The members of the city of honor unite to achieve honor, popularity, fame, glory and magnificence in the eyes of other individuals. In the city of power, the ultimate meaning of life is to triumph over others. The only joy in their life is the feel of power. The inhabitants of democratic city congregate to establish a level of freedom that allows them to do whatever they may wish. In other words, their ultimate goal is to live without limits to their passions (al-Fārābī, 1968-b: 130-133).

Al-Fārābī preoccupies himself with the detail of non-virtuous communities (in more concrete terms, non-Muslim communities) to show that each has a different kind of deficiency. However, all these types of communities are opposed to the virtuous city because they lack its guiding principle, which is true knowledge and virtues encouraging true happiness. According to al-Fārābī, true happiness can only be achieved through divine knowledge. This, in turn, requires guidance of God in the form of religious laws which can be attained under the leadership of a philosopher or a prophet. However, the very basic identity

of the citizens in non-virtuous is formed with a view to attaining different kinds of inferior goals. This is why they are must not be permitted to associate with subjects of the virtuous city, and the virtuous community should isolate itself from them. Thus al-Fārābī classifies different kinds of communities in regard to their distance from true religion. In other words, the main principle of political association for al-Fārābī is religious identity. Hence, he argues for a religious identity-based organization of the city. Furthermore, since he categorizes communities according to their religious identities, disregards any possible connection between different religious identities and maintains the idea of superiority of the virtuous city, which he identifies with the faithful Islamic community, he can be regarded as one of the principal inspirational sources for Ottoman millet system. The connection becomes even more evident when we consider the title of al-Fārābī's famous book, *Kitāb al-Millah* (The Book of Religion), in which he discussed the issues of religious identity, different kinds of religious communities and their relation in the society.

Another inspirational source for Ottoman millet system is Ibn Bajjah, whose political philosophy is heavily dependent on al-Fārābī. Like al-Fārābī, Ibn Bajjah also divides political organizations into two main categories: the virtuous and the non-virtuous. However, he further develops his analysis of the non-virtuous city by means of another philosophical theory, *tadbīr al-mutawahhid*. According to this theory, in some non-virtuous communities, occasionally an individual, whom he calls "*mutawahhid*" or "*nabit*", may emerge who "lives in an ignorant state, yet has the righteous thoughts" (Ibn Bajjah, 1994: 13-15). Ibn Bajjah takes as inspiration the couch grass which grows its own separate breed in cultivated land. Such an individual (or rarely individuals) attains intellectual perfection and moral competence on his own. Yet, because of the profound dissidence between him and members of the society, it is impossible for him to help them to achieve the goal of moral and intellectual perfection. Therefore, it is necessary for such a virtuous person to remove himself from society as much as possible, and to come into contact with it only for essential needs. In other words, such individuals must isolate themselves from the non-virtuous societies. In an ignorant society, where people adore and admire solely the ostentation and parade, virtuous individuals have a strong incentive to live in seclusion for their own happiness. Like a wise individual who takes all the necessary precautions in the case of plague and insulates himself from everything contaminated, a *mutawahhid*

also should avoid any unnecessary contact with ignorant and unwary society (Ibn Bajjah, 1994: 80-81).

It is very clear that Ibn Bajjah argues for a political setting where virtuous *mutawahhid* should avoid any kind of interaction with non-virtuous individuals or societies. On a larger scale one might interpret that among the nations and empires, Ottomans considered themselves to be the virtuous *mutawahhid* and they upheld their unique status by erecting certain social barriers. Likewise, domestically, the millet system functioned to protect Ottoman-Muslim identity where all other identities considered to be non-virtuous and somehow ignorant. Therefore, the element of isolation in the millet system can be traced back to this theoretical framework. When we consider Ibn Bajjah's prominence in the tradition of Islamic political philosophy, it seems likely that his work influenced the theoretical framework of the millet system.

Another point of consideration is the practical purposes of the millet system. Since it is likely that some minority members might attempt to imitate the identity of governing majority, soon there could be many members of minorities who dress, speak and behave like the majority. This fact might easily lead to a social chaos and endanger the privileges of sovereign identity, Muslim identity. Separation is intended to prevent blurred, amalgamated or crossbred identities. In this way, the prominent peculiarities of Muslim identity such as dressing or certain accessories, along with minorities' distinctive features would be protected.

A second aim of the separation of identities was to avert the suppression of other identities. Under the conditions in which each identity is distinct and delineated, it is hard to violate the boundaries and disturb others. Because, as we will see later, such violations of boundaries are severely punished crimes, it is highly unlikely that one community will cause harm to another. Consequently, the very milieu in which every identity securely and somewhat freely lived was created and no one was allowed to pretend to be someone else.

Without examining actual cases, it is not evident to what extent this system was efficient. Since any system can seem effective as long as it is untested, it is necessary to demonstrate how the millet system functioned on the practical level, via concrete evidence. Since vestures, wedding ceremonies, and even neighborhoods are closely tied to a certain identity and, in the millet system, are considered the very expres-

sions of identity, I will show through fatwas and archival documents how hard it was for any community to imitate or suppress the others.[1*]

1. Weddings and Other Occasions

According to fatwas, Ottoman Shaikh al-Islam considered celebrating any kind of festivals or weddings ceremonies with non-Muslims as an act of betrayal and apostasy for a Muslim. They held that whoever commits such a sin is obligated to re-affirm his belief in the creeds and also renew his marriage contract:

Question: If Muslim Zayd dances and has fun in style of non-believers, what are his obligations?

Answer: He is obligated to re-affirm his belief in the creeds and also renew his wedlock (marital contract). (Majmuat al-Fatāwā, no: 107: ms. 67a; Müsvedde Fatāwā, no: 239: ms. 103a; Feyziyye, 1266: 161) (Abdurrahim, 1827: I, 97)

Question: "The Christians of a certain village hold public celebrations three days out of the year in accordance to their ancient traditions during which time they sing and dance. Although they have caused no harm to any Muslims, the Jews have complained and have sought to prevent the celebrations. Can they?"

Answer: …If the infidels hold their festival on a Friday, they are infringing on Muslims rights and causing harm. It is not appropriate here to say whether they or the Jews are the more accursed community. The religious communities should be separate."

"Ruling of Ebusuud Efendi" (Düzdağ, 1983: 96)

1   * Sources of the fatwas are as following: Velī b. Yusuf, *Majmuat al-Fatāwā,* Istanbul Mufti Library no: 178; Atâullah Muhammed, *Fatāwā-i Atāullah, no: 144:* Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 144; Shaykh al-Islam Seyyid Feyzullah Efendi, *Fatāwā-i Feyziyye,* Istanbul,1266; Shaykh al-Islam Çatalcalı Ail Efendi, *Fatāwā-i Ali Efendi,* Istanbul,1266; Shaykh al-Islam Menteşīzâde Abdurrahim Efendi, *Fatāwā-i Abdurrahim,* Istanbul, 1827; Osman b. Muhammed Tosyevī, no: 310: *Fatāwā-i Tosyevî, no: 310:* Istanbul Mufti Library no: 310; Shaykh al-Islam Yahya Efendi, *Fatāwā-i Yahya Efendi,* Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 49; Muhammad Fıkhī el-Aynī, *Behcet al- Fatāwā,* Istanbul, 1872; Fetva Emini Ahmed Efendi, *Natijat al-Fatāwā,* Istanbul, 1265; Shaykh al-Islam Esad Efendi, *Fatāwā-i Es'adiyye*, Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 157; Shaykh al-Islam Ürgüplü Mustafa Hayri Efendi, *al-Farāid al-Bahiyye Fī al- Fatāwā al-Khayriyye*, Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 315; Jarīda-i Ilmiyya, (a journal published by Bāb-ı Meşīhat between 1914-1922 in Istanbul); Ali Murtaza b. Zübeyr, *İlāveli Mecmūa-i Cedide*, Istanbul, 1911; Ibrahim b. al-Shaykh Ismail el-Kastamonī, *Fatāwā-i Hallī, no: 1193:* Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 1193; *Fatāwā*, Anonymous, Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 239; *Majmuat al- Fatāwā*, Anonymous, Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 107; *Beyaz Sipāre*, Anonymous, Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 560; Seyyid Hamdullah, *Fatāwā-i Uskūbī*, Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 238; Edirnevī Ahmed Efendi, *al-Ajwibat al-Kāni'a*, Istanbul Mufti Library, no: 176.

2.   Religious Festivals

In the religious festivals of Christian community, Muslims were allowed to accept some gifts from non-Muslims. For instance, if a Muslim got an egg from a Christian at Easter, he is allowed to accept this egg only for the sake of generosity. However, it was strictly forbidden to join them and celebrate any kind of religious festivals.

Question: "What if Muslim Zayd walks into the area of their festival and dances expressing his joy as if he is an infidel?"

"What if he attends to the community of non-believers and drinks alcohol with them and on the top of all of these, he dances like them in their religious rituals?" (Abdullah Efendi, 1827: 185)

Answer: He is obligated to re-affirm his belief in creeds and also renew his wedlock. (Abdullah Efendi, 1827: 554), (Abdurrahim, 1827: I, 96-97; Atâullah, 144: ms. 32a)

3.   Vestures and Accessories

In the Ottoman Empire, the appearance of a person was a very direct and precise sign of his identity. Thus, the outfit was a very important element of daily life and was taken very seriously in Muslim-minority relations. The principle, in this case, was clearly stated: None of the communities was allowed to dress like the other/s. So distinction was a guiding rule in this area as well.

If a non-Muslim dresses like a Muslim or even wears a green ring, he would be banned from such an act by court rule immediately. (Abdurrahim, 1827: I, 81; Ali Efendi, 1266: I, 175; Hallī, no: 1193: ms. 96b; Majmuat al-Fatāwā, no: 107: ms. 70b; Ataullah, no: 144: ms. 28a)

Muslims were also not allowed to wear any non-Muslim clothes. If any Muslim dressed in an "infidel styled hat" ("*masharalık edüb başına kâfir serpuşi giyse*") he was again obligated to re-announce his belief in creeds and also renew his wedlock (marital contract).

The very same verdict was valid even if he wore it intending mockery. (Majmuat al-Fatāwā, no: 107: ms. 66a; Ali Efendi, 1266: I, 181; Müsvedde Fetâvâ, no: 239: ms. 102a).

4.   Settlement Policy

Ottoman settlement policy was mainly based on the separation of neighborhoods. Every community lived within its own boundaries and produced, practiced and developed its own culture. Hence, nobody

was given the opportunity of threatening other cultures and values.

Two rules were strictly followed in the Muslim settlements: interrupting or interfering with Muslim rituals was forbidden and disturbing the Muslim community in any way was considered unacceptable. A non-Muslim community was allowed to buy or hire a house in a Muslim neighborhood only if it was complying with these conditions such as keeping mosque in the neighborhood from being unattended (Majmuat al-Fatāwā, no: 107: ms. 71a; Hallî, no: 1193: ms. 96a; Ali Efendi, 1266: I, 174).

As far as non-Muslim neighborhoods are considered, Muslims are not allowed to buy or hire houses from these areas if they wanted to change the nature of the area. For instance, when Muslims started to pray in a mosque next to a non-Muslim area they could not practice rituals because of the noise caused by cheers. Muslims complained about it officially and suggested to replace non-Muslims with Muslims. But the court did not approve such a suggestion, saying that it is originally a non-Muslim neighborhood (Es'ad Efendi, no: 157: I, ms. 225b).

Conclusions

Identities function within a social structure. Therefore, identities are manifested only in social contexts or through associations, which delineate and establish them. Since individuals are concerned with distinguishing themselves from others, they tend to emphasize the groups to which they belong, in the times of traditional societies. That process eventually creates a social identification thru the community and throughout the time, this association rises to the level of primary identity.

Religious identity is a vital element of social interaction and was even more crucial in pre-modern eras. By adopting the behavioral code of a certain group, the individual feels that he/she has been recognized and acknowledged to be a social agent, which entails a social position. This social position was very often associated with a religious identity which regulated an individual's daily life and interactions. Thus, for each member of each community, identity became a means of self-expression.

Since, from one perspective, a community can be reduced to its, it is sensible to suppose that separation of the members of communities or isolation in certain respects, is a secure way to protect the authenticity

of each identity. Although it is not very sensible to suppose that in a diverse society impenetrable barriers were built, one can still argue that Ottoman legal system was able to prevent the emergence of blurred, amalgamated and crossbred identities to some extent. The very basic tool to design the social life in this sense was the millet system. There have been multiple studies to point out liberal and pluralist character of this system. Most of these studies emphasize, rather accurately, unprecedented tolerance of the millet system and how it helped different religious communities in the society to epitomize their own identity and culture. However, they come short as far as the separation of identities is considered. Further, since it is not the matter at hand, obviously none of them attempts to shed light on the possible theoretical roots of the millet system.

Both of al-Fārābī and Ibn Bajjah are famous for their theories in political philosophy. Especially al-Fārābī is very influential in the long tradition of Islamic political philosophy. His categorization of communities into virtuous and non-virtuous based on their religious attitude is widely accepted. Further, his model suggesting that virtuous communities and individuals should be separated from non-virtuous identities is highly esteemed. Being in great depth to al-Fārābī, Ibn Bajjah also suggests that righteous individuals *(al-mutawahhid)* in a non-virtuous world, must avoid any unnecessary contact or influential interactions with non-virtuous entities whether individuals or society to sustain their perfection (*tadbīr al-mutawahhid*). These essential and very widespread theories of these two philosophers can be regarded as foremost theoretical sources of millet system.

In the practical level, in accordance with the political philosophy of al-Fārābī and Ibn Bajjah, Ottomans largely followed the policy of separation of the identities. As it is presented in the case study of fatwas and archive documents, Ottoman millet system was not only a liberal, tolerant and everlasting order of freedoms. Rather, it contained some restraining, restrictive and preventive elements. However, those elements were only to protect designated rights and allocated free space of each religious identity.

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