Hazal Papuççular

Chapter 7
The Wilsonian Ideas of the Ottoman
Turkish Intelligentsia in Post-World War I
Turkey

1. Introduction

The Turkish National Movement which started after the end of the First World War has been mostly analyzed from "national" lenses leading to a historiography devoid of global currents. Lately, this historiography which even explored the foreign policy of the movement within a traditional perspective of bilateral relations in an isolated manner has increasingly been challenged by fresh approaches that were supported by the rise of global and transnational history. In a recent article, the renowned researcher of modern Turkey, Erik J. Zürcher, highlighted that the Turkish National Movement has almost never been discussed with regard to global developments of the time despite its important place as the first upheaval of the post-war period, and emphasized that the movement had ideological bases related to global politics.[1] According to him, these ideologies were rising nationalism, socialism and anti-imperialism, nascent revisionism and Wilsonianism mostly in the shape of self-determination.[2]

In this chapter, I attempt to scrutinize the last point that Zürcher indicated in terms of Wilsonianism, broadening the scope from the Turkish National Movement to the postwar Turkey in general. In this respect, I will analyze the impact of Wilsonianism in postwar Turkey and its various dynamics that took shape based on the perceived national interests of the Ottoman-Turkish intelligentsia. That corresponded to the "Wilsonian moment" of the Ottoman Turkish intelligentsia, who seemed very enthusiastic about the ideas of the US president not being very different from the politicians and intellectuals of other colonial countries, as Erez Manela has discussed some of them in his groundbreaking book.[3] The Wilsonian idea as a global phenomenon waned in a relatively short period of

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1 Erik Jan Zürcher, "Contextualizing the Ideology of the Turkish National Resistance Movement," *Middle Eastern Studies* 57, no. 2 (2021): 265–278, here 265.
2 Zürcher, "Contextualizing the Ideology."
3 For Manela's work, see Erez Manela, *Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of the Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

time, but in the meantime its excitement had reached different parts of the world. In the Ottoman Turkish context, the Wilsonian principles became a common ground for people with different ideological backgrounds. On the one hand, it was utilized by Ottoman statesmen in Istanbul who went to Paris in 1919 in order to explain their position regarding the hopeless Ottoman peace treaty. On the other hand, it was also used by the Kemalists, who were organizing the Turkish resistance in Anatolia and positioning themselves against most of the above-mentioned politicians.

This situation also applies to the intellectuals of the time, who even constituted a political organization named *Wilson Prensipleri Cemiyeti* (Wilsonian Principles League) in Istanbul, in order to find a future for the country based on the ideas of Wilson. The founders and members of this League, most of them renowned intellectuals of the time, had very different backgrounds and ideological orientations. Indeed, it is very surprising to see some characters from modern Turkish history in the same organization, for instance Yunus Nadi (Abalıoğlu) who would become an ardent Kemalist during the course of the Turkish National Movement and Ali Kemal who keenly opposed this movement. Actually, neither the Wilsonian Principles League nor the intelligentsia that established this association in postwar Turkey were the only examples of Wilsonian understanding. On the contrary, many intellectuals and politicians as well as associations founded in this era debated the principles with respect to Turkey. Thus, in this chapter I aim to show the character of the "Wilsonian moment" of Turkey, by shedding light upon what the Turkish intelligentsia understood from these principles and what they really advocated by their reliance on Wilson's principles.

In this regard, this chapter is in close contact with several historiographies. First, it points out the interconnectedness of the world as the Global Intellectual History framework has in recent years successfully conceptualized. Moyn and Sartori have emphasized in their groundbreaking volume that this interconnectedness can be shown not only in terms of circulation of ideas through translation of the texts, book markets, or intellectual networks, but can also be theorized by constructing an international system.[4] In the case of postwar Turkey, how the Wilsonian idea was diffused, comprehended, evaluated and shaped by the intelligentsia in an assumed process of changing international order can exemplify such a global intellectual approach to history. In addition to this, this chapter

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4 Samul Moyn and Andrew Sartori, "Approaches to Global Intellectual History," in *Global Intellectual History*, eds. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 14 – 15.

also refers to the post-1990s notion that international history got closer – again – to intellectual history and/or international political thought as argued by David Armitage.[5] In recent decades, international historians have become more interested in culture, ideas and international institutions and systems, while intellectual historians have been more inclined to deal with the interaction between peoples, states and institutions, specifically with respect to international political thought.[6] Therefore, the history of the international system constructed after the end of the First World War, and relatedly the idea of Wilsonianism regarding self-determination and the formation the League of Nations with an understanding of collective security, emphasizes this orientation. Last but not least, this chapter is also linked with Turkish historiography, in which Wilsonianism and Wilsonian Principles League have been analyzed through the lenses of the history of postwar Turkey, lacking any emphasis on the global and/or transnational character of it. However, as I aim to show, not only politicians but also intellectuals who tried to utilize these principles were actually as much part of a global phenomenon as a national one.

2. Wilsonianism: Conflicting Principles of the Postwar International Order

The US President Woodrow Wilson's ideas about international relations affected the whole world during and after the First World War. While his ideas concerning the League of Nations and collective security were regarded as a strong moment of liberal internationalism in world politics, his emphasis on self-determination turned into a movement for many ethnic groups, which competed with each other in petitioning the president during the Paris Peace Conference to realize statehood. His ideas were criticized inside his own country given that he had too extensively involved the US in European politics. However, he was definitely praised by many in the world, at least for one year between 1918 and 1919. In order to understand what brought Wilson to the forefront within this one year, it is necessary to analyze his viewpoints on postwar politics.

Wilsonianism is actually a vague concept in the sense that not only could academics not agree upon the common assumptions of the term but also the ma-

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5 David Armitage, "The International Turn in Intellectual History," in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History,* eds. Darrin MacMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 236.

6 Armitage, "The International Turn in Intellectual History."

jority of the US presidents after Wilson claimed that they were pursuing Wilsonian foreign policy despite their different ideological orientations.[7] In addition to the ambiguity of these assumptions, the abstract evaluation of Wilson's principles, regardless of his personal character, belief system and education etc., sometimes generates shock among researchers or readers since the principles of the President mostly conflict with his actions, leading to remarks about hypocrisy. For instance, Wilson supported self-determination, yet at the same time he held some racist convictions that not all nations were equally deserving democratic governance.[8] With regard to Turkey, he defended the Greek occupation of Izmir although he had foreseen Turkish sovereignty in the areas predominantly inhabited by ethnic Turks. Likewise, he was an ardent defender of collective security, but as Menchik has argued, his understanding of this notion was heavily influenced by his religious beliefs, turning this notion more in the direction of a Christian alliance.[9] Therefore, Wilsonian Principles offer a couple of perplexities to the reader especially when considered together with the disappointment that the postwar settlements and international system had brought with them. Nevertheless, there was excitement on a global scale before the aforementioned disappointment, despite the conflictual relationship between the theory and practice of Wilsonianism.

It is quite ironic that Wilson is remembered mostly by his vision concerning international affairs instead of domestic politics, although he had himself acknowledged that internal affairs provided his focal point.[10] However, since his first term in the office coincided with the First World War, which could not be ignored, Wilson took a necessary interest in international affairs, long before the American belligerence that was declared in 1917. The ideas of the President that took eventual shape with the declaration of the famous Fourteen Points in 1918 had evolved through time and reflected not only theoretical and conviction-related orientations but also practical necessities of the war.

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7 John A. Thompson, "Wilsonianism: The Dynamics of a Conflicted Concept," *International Affairs* 86, no. 1 (2010): 29.

8 Jeremy Menchik, "Woodrow Wilson and the Spirit of Liberal Internationalism," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 22, no. 2 (2021): 252.

9 Menchik, "Woodrow Wilson and the Spirit of Liberal Internationalism," 251.

10 William Keylor quotes "[i]t would be the irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs." William R. Keylor, "Wilson's Project for a New World Order of Permanent Peace and Security," in *A Companion to Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Ross A. Kennedy (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 470.

The ideological leanings of Wilson that were also in direct relationship with his upbringing, education and his studies before his presidency were preceded by the First World War. For example, Wilson had been eminently influenced by the classical liberalism of Adam Smith as well as Gladstonian liberalism, paving the way for his support for international free trade,[11] as also concretized by the Fourteen Points. Likewise, his belief in the Enlightenment idea of progress could be regarded as a background for his reliance on the reform of the political apparatus towards democracy, while his religious upbringing mostly based on Calvinism indicated an orientation towards self-determination which was supposed to stem from the idea of "equal opportunity."[12] This ideational backdrop that unequivocally affected future Wilsonianism can be elaborated more. Yet, it should be emphasized that it was the First World War that became a principal spark to turn these sporadic personal dispositions into a set of principles for the future of international order.

During the war, the two – most important – issues that Wilson dealt with pertaining to the postwar order was the notion of self-determination on the one hand, and the understanding of collective security on the other. These two foundations made Wilsonianism both nationalist and internationalist at the same time.[13] The idea of self-determination had already started to occupy political agendas and discussions when the war broke out. In 1914 and 1915, not only politicians such as French Prime Minister Briand but also Peace Societies that were formed in Europe and in the United States were favoring border changes based on the understanding of self-determination.[14] Wilson had also made several comments on self-determination and concomitantly on the future of European countries in these years. However, the breakthrough for the idea of self-determination arrived in 1917, both with American belligerency and with the Bolshevik Revolution.

The notion of self-determination had already been discussed and formulated by Lenin, who tried to reconcile revolutionary socialism with the question of nationalism, turning the idea into official policy after the Bolshevik Revolution.[15] According to Chernev, the peace negotiations at Brest-Litovsk witnessed the ac-

11 Derek Heater, *National Self-Determination, Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 22.

12 Heater, *National Self-Determination*, 23.

13 Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 21.

14 Heater, *National Self-Determination*, 29.

15 Borislav Chernev, "The Brest-Litovsk Moment: Self-Determination Discourse in Eastern Europe before Wilsonianism," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22, no. 3 (2011): 370 – 371.

ceptance of self-determination policy by both the revolutionary government in Russia and the Central Powers, making the gathering a "Wilsonian moment before Wilson."[16] It is highly debatable whether Lenin and Wilson had understood similar things from self-determination as a policy, but it should be emphasized that the Bolshevik Revolution prompted Wilson to advance his own postwar program. After all, the US had entered the war in 1917 and were in need of a program. The President had explained the war rationale as a fight "for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free."[17]

After several months of work undertaken by a group of experts, named the Inquiry, the renowned Fourteen Points were finalized in 1918. The wording of the Fourteen Points reflected a nuance with regard to the concept of self-determination, employing the word "autonomous development" instead of "self-determination" specifically for the nationalities of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Throntveit argues that the main standard for the Fourteen Points had become the civic understanding of self-government embodied in the concept of autonomous development instead of the ethno-nationalist program of Bolsheviks who supported the quest of all ethnic groups for independence under the banner of self-determination.[18] Even if this difference between the understanding of Wilson and Lenin over its definition played a role in the wording of the Fourteen Points, the practical necessities of the situation also needs to be taken into consideration. There was an exigency to reconcile contradictory national aspirations especially in Eastern Europe, leading Wilson gradually to articulate some reservations about the implementation of the concept.[19] Understanding this nuance in wording also constitutes a key to understand Wilson's occasional conflictual attitude during the peace talks in Paris. However, despite its ambiguity, it was this principle, associated with Wilson, that became a slogan for the people in search of self-determination all over the world, including the Ottomans.

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16 Chernev, "The Brest-Litovsk Moment."

17 For the full speech of Wilson, see Woodrow Wilson, *Americanism: Woodrow Wilson's Speeches on the War—Why He Made Them—and—What They Have Done,* ed. Oliver Marble Gale (Chicago: Baldwin, 1918), 36–44.

18 Trygve Throntveit, *Power without Victory: Woodrow Wilson and the American Internationalist Experiment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 249.

19 Allen Lynch, "Woodrow Wilson and the Principle of 'National Self-Determination': A Reconsideration," *Review of International Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 425–429.

The second matter that Wilson ambitiously worked to realize was the formation of an international institution that would enhance collective security, thus supposedly prevent bloody wars in the future. The idea was based on – not particularly American – 19th-century internationalism that theorized a society of nations that would function through the ideas of free trade, international law and conflict resolution.[20] The First World War created an environment for a new world order to be formulated. Thus, the last clause of the Fourteen Points foresaw the formation of the League of Nations to protect the integrity of great and small nations in an equal manner. Yet, this "equality" understanding, even associated with the upbringing of the US president as mentioned above, faced one of its first challenges from the European powers represented in Paris, who wanted the great powers to rule the League.[21] That was not the only difference of viewpoint given that the European victors did not want to leave their colonial dreams. The mandate system that was established under the responsibility of the League for the former German colonies and Ottoman territories was also a compromise between Wilsonianism and European imperial aims.[22] When the League was formed, according to Ikenberry, it reflected a conservative approach to internationalism since it challenged neither the European understanding of empire nor racial hierarchies.[23] Despite this, it constituted one of the two most important pillars of Wilsonianism. Yet it was of secondary importance to the Ottoman Turkish intelligentsia since the main matter for them concerned decisions about the future borders.

3. The "Wilsonian Moment" of the Ottoman Turkish Intelligentsia

The dissemination of the Wilsonian idea over the Ottoman Turkish intelligentsia has been handled in Turkish historiography from a highly restricted perspective. It is mostly based on the Wilsonian Principles League and focuses on the question of who had (or had not) favored the solution of an American mandate during the time of the Turkish National Movement. Therefore, it tries to make a clear

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20 G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 103.

21 Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44.

22 Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 45.

23 Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy*, 102.

distinction between the supporters of the mandate system in the face of those who tried to reach full independence via resistance.[24] This constitutes one of the important discussion points in Turkish historiography, symbolizing a specific division among the political elites of the time that would leave a mark on Turkish politics in the 1920s. The mandate question undeniably forms a significant part of the debates around Wilsonianism since some leading figures, such as Halide Edib (Adıvar), an important name in Turkish intelligentsia questioned the matter from 1918 to late 1919 as a possible solution to the future of Turkey, which did not seem promising when observed from Paris or Istanbul. In other words, the deliberations around an American mandate in a possible post-Ottoman Turkey are somehow intrinsic to the Wilsonian understanding in Turkey. However, the engagement of the Ottoman Turkish intelligentsia with Wilsonianism transcends both this debate and the Wilsonian Principles League, which was merely a short-lived experience. The problematization of the Wilsonian principles was a reaction of the Ottoman Turks to a changing international system in relation to a century old question about the future of their own country in an emerging new world structure. In this sense, that was not different from the rest of the world, making this engagement a global phenomenon.

In the postwar world, for many societies, Wilson had turned into a kind of "prophet," who would change the dynamics of the international system in which the notion of self-determination and equality of the nations would supposedly open a new path for the colonized, marginalized and oppressed people.[25] As Manela showed through the cases of Egypt, India, China and Korea, several segments of these societies, from politicians to intellectuals, from women's associations to student groups organized themselves in order to reach their aims based on the promises of President Wilson.[26] In a similar vein, in the postwar reorganization of Eastern/Central European borders, different ethnic groups tumultuously appealed to the Wilsonian principles and Wilson himself, although these could not prevent the formation of new boundaries with major minorities

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24 There are two valuable academic studies in this manner, which give the reader rich data about the Wilsonian Principles League founded in Turkey, but that also prefer to analyze the relevant data through the lenses of the mandate debate in Turkey. For these two studies, see Fethi Tevetoğlu, *Millî Mücadele Yıllarındaki Kuruluşlar* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1988) and Mine Erol, *Türkiye'de Amerikan Mandası Meselesi, 1919 – 1920* (Giresun: Ileri Basımevi, 1972).
25 Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*, 3 – 6.
26 One of the means that these groups used in order to explain their causes to the US President was to send immense amount of petitions, letters etc. to the Paris Peace Conference. See Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*, ix.

in the end.[27] This global reach was so effective that some socialist groups also sympathized with the postwar project of Wilson alongside that of Lenin despite the extant ideological distinction between two views yet with a common ground for anti-colonialism.[28] All of these ideas favoring Wilsonianism vanished globally after 1919, in other words, after it was well understood that Wilsonian principles were not a panacea for the existing international order. Therefore, neither the rise nor decline of Wilsonianism in Turkey can be analyzed without taking these currents into consideration.

In this sense, when Wilson declared his Fourteen Points, its twelfth clause stated that

> the Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an un-doubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous develop-ment, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.[29]

This was seen by many (both statesmen and the public) as a means of keeping the Ottoman Empire intact. In 1918, the Ottoman government, with other states belonging to the Central Powers, demanded armistice based on these principles as they were considered a possibly softer way out of the war, providing the hope for some form of continuing Ottoman territorial integrity. Thereafter, the Ottoman intelligentsia started to write about and discuss Wilsonianism from different point of views. However, despite their varying opinions and aims, it was clear that Wilsonianism had turned into a common keyword for nearly all of the Ottomans.

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27 Transylvania was a major case in this respect. For more information about the formation of Romania's new borders and the position of Hungarians, see Wesley J. Reisser, "Self-Determination and the Difficulty of Creating Nation-States: the Transylvania Case," *Geographical Review* 99, no. 2 (2009): 231–247.
28 The reformist wing of the Italian Socialist Party in Europe provides a good example to this situation. For more information on how they considered liberal internationalism, see Jacopo Perazzoli, "Woodrow Wilson, Italian Socialists, and the Self-determination Principle during the Paris Conference," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 25, no. 5 (2020): 508–527.
29 "President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points", 8 January 1918, available online at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp

3.1. The Wilsonian Ideas of the Ottoman Turkish Intelligentsia for the Future of Turkey

Very similar to the rest of the world, Ottoman Turkish intellectuals were expecting new dynamics in the international order by 1918. The renowned journalist of the era, Celal Nuri (İleri), as one the founders of the newspapers *Âti* (Future) and *İleri* (Forward) and a future member of the Wilsonian Principles League emphasized this point in his writings during the war. He stated that international politics was changing in such a way that the center of the world was moving toward America and Japan from Europe.[30] This expected change in the international balance together with the rise of Wilsonianism symbolized a positive transformation for many Ottoman Turkish intellectuals such as Celal Nuri, as this new system provided them with an exit strategy from the injustices of the old imperial system.[31] Cemil Aydın explains clearly how Celal Nuri could easily reconcile his views with those of Wilson, offering an alternative vision to the existing international order.[32] Nuri was actually a practical Panislamist mostly due to the perceived injustices that the Ottoman Empire faced at the hands of the Europeans, and additionally he was an intellectual who had already written on international law supporting the views about the equal natural rights of the states in international relations.[33] Therefore, it can be argued that the change in the international order based on Wilsonianism also created an alternative new West (mostly symbolized by the US) for a short period of time for some of the Ottoman intellectuals as exemplified by Celal Nuri, instead of the old one associated mostly with discrimination.

What kind of a polity could be realized in this changing international order? This was also related to a long-standing question of the Ottoman Empire that had been answered with different formulations and ideologies by the intelligentsia since the 19th century. The title of the famous book written by Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Three Ways of Politics) corresponds to the attempted implementation of the three ideologies from the 19th century to the end of the First World War: Ottomanism, Islamism and Turkism.[34] The imagination of the de-

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30 For instance, see "Merkez-i Alem Değişiyor," *Âti*, 24 September 1918, 2, quoted by Sırrı Emrah Üçer, "Mütareke Döneminde Osmanlı Kamuoyunda Amerikan İmgesi ve Tesiri (Eylül 1918-Mayıs 1919)," Unpublished MA Thesis, Istanbul University, 2008, 88.

31 Cemil Aydın, *Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 128–129.

32 Aydın, *Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*.

33 Aydın, *Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*.

34 For the book, see Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1976).

mography and the boundaries of the empire were surely different according to these three ideologies. Therefore, it was quite understandable that the above-mentioned twelfth principle of Wilson was analyzed from different perspectives under the conditions prevailing in 1918, at a time when the Turkish National Movement was not yet ripe and the Ottoman Turkish intelligentsia were waiting for peace negotiations, which would be a turning point, especially with regard to the interpretation of the twelfth point. In this sense, for example, Celal Nuri was still supporting the Ottoman unity and blaming the Turkist policies of the Committee of Union and Progress implemented during the war.[35] Wilson's twelfth point still made Ottoman integrity an option for many Ottoman Turkish intellectuals, at least for the areas where they had a claim of both a Muslim and a Turkish majority, including Eastern and Western Anatolia that planned to be later given to Armenians and Greeks.

This understanding in relation to the twelfth point could also be seen at the level of the Ottoman government. An important document published by the Ottoman Embassy in Switzerland in November 1918, with the title of "Turkish Interpretation of the President's Fourteen Points," which evaluated the principles one by one mentions "Ottoman federalism" concerning the twelfth point, by emphasizing that autonomous development it mentions would be the developed version of the traditional autonomy that the Ottoman Empire had provided to its Christian population.[36] Moving the discussion from the *ancien régime* to *Tanzimat*, the Ottoman discourse emphasized the same point by suggesting that the reforms in this era could not be implemented because the sovereignty and the integrity of the empire were being continuously challenged.[37] This document demonstrates that the Ottoman government did not have any doubts about Mesopotamia or Syria's desire to be included in this federal structure of the Ottoman Empire.[38] A similar understanding was reiterated by Grand Vizier Damat Ferit Paşa at the Paris Peace Conference in June 1919, through which the Ottoman representative demanded keeping not only Thrace and Izmir, which were occupied by the Greeks at that time, based on the self-determination principle, but also the Arab populated regions that were regarded as "linked with Constantinople

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35 Ebru Boyar, "The Impact of the Balkan Wars on Ottoman History Writing: Searching for a Soul," *Middle East Critique* 23, no. 2 (2014): 149.

36 "Turkish Interpretation of the President's Fourteen Points," 7 November 1918, Mandell House Archive quoted by Erol, "*Türkiye'de Amerikan Mandası Meselesi*," 115–118.

37 Erol, "*Türkiye'de Amerikan Mandası Meselesi*.".

38 Erol, "*Türkiye'de Amerikan Mandası Meselesi*."

by feelings which are deeper than the principle of nationality."[39] According to the grand vizier, all of these demands were compatible with the Wilsonian Principles based on which the Ottoman government had requested an armistice.[40] However, the conditions of the time when Ferit Paşa made this speech in Paris were very different from that of 1918, given that Izmir had already been occupied, the Greater Armenia comprising Eastern Anatolia was being formulated, the future of Istanbul, as the capital of the Ottomans was being discussed by the Entente powers, and Britain and France were determined to share the sovereignty of the Near East.

This broader conceptualization of the Ottoman Empire was challenged by several intellectuals, on the other hand, who supported Turkish nationalism again based on the Wilsonian principles, mostly related to the notion of self-determination. One of them was Mehmet Fuat (Köprülü), a well-known Turcologist who would also serve as the chairman of the Turkish Historical Society and become a Minister of Education and also Foreign Affairs during the Republican period. In one of his articles, he replied to the abovementioned essay supporting an Ottomanist vision by Celal Nuri. Mehmet Fuat suggested that Turks should have asserted their own nation in order to survive in an international order in which only nations had a right to self-determination.[41] A similar understanding was also supported in Istanbul by other groups, like *Milli Türk Fırkası* (Turkish National Party) that was formed by the members of the *Türk Ocakları* (Turkish Hearths) such as Mehmed Emin (Yurdakul) and Ahmet Ferit (Tek). That party was ascribed to the support of Turkish nationalism, defining Turkish identity with regard to Wilsonian self-determination either on the basis of ethnicity or in connection to the Turkish language and customs.[42] This was an important discussion showing how existing ideologies in the empire were positioned according to the necessities of Wilsonianism as well as the visions of the intelligentsia concerning the postwar borders and demography of the future shape of Turkey.

However, these ideas also had their anti-theses when the issue was considered with respect to Anatolia, including issues such as the self-determination of the Kurds. In 1919, Şerif Paşa, a politician and the son of a Kurdish notable who

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39 Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, (FRUS), The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Volume IV, Paris Peace Conf. 180.03101/69, BC–62, 17 June 1919, 509–511, available online at https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1919Parisv04/d30

40 Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, (FRUS), The Paris Peace Conference, 1919, Volume IV, Paris Peace Conf. 180.03101/69, BC–62, 17 June 1919, 509–511.

41 Boyar, "The Impact of the Balkan Wars," 149.

42 Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler,* vol. 2, (Istanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1986), 534.

was a former Ottoman minister, went to the Paris Peace Conference in order to claim a Kurdish state based on self-determination. Hakan Özoğlu suggests that the collaboration between Şerif Paşa and Armenians with regard to borders in the peace process led to the Kurdish tribal leaders supporting the Turkish National Movement in the end, due to conflicting claims of Kurds and Armenians.[43] In the meantime, the future of the Kurds in the context of the Wilsonian Principles were being discussed on various platforms. Abdullah Cevdet, one of the founders of the Committee of Union and Progress and a renowned intellectual of the Second Constitutional Period wrote intensively about the issue of Kurdish independence after the Mudros armistice. According to him, the Wilsonian Principles should not have been supported only in cases favorable for Turks. The focus on self-determination should not only have been employed while protesting the Greek occupation of Izmir, but also when it concerned the founding of a Kurdish state in areas that were predominantly Kurdish.[44] As an advocate of Ottoman unity during the Second Constitutional Period, Abdullah Cevdet turned into a Kurdish nationalist in the postwar era, during which several intellectuals started to perceive Ottoman rule over different ethnicities as imperialism,[45] embracing the idea of self-determination as a panacea.

This problem concerning the ideas of self-determination of Turks as Mehmet Fuat argued and the future of Anatolia was solved by the *Misak-ı Millî* (National Pact) that employed the term "Ottoman Muslims."[46] This pact, which became the document underlining the territorial aims of the Turkish National Movement, also reflected the understanding of the Wilsonian Principles. On the one hand, it emphasized self-determination, and demanded plebiscites in Arab populated regions of the empire, in addition, on the other hand, to Batum, Kars, Ardahan (*Elviye-i Selâse*) and Western Thrace in conformity with the practice of the day to prove sovereignty. Therefore, the National Pact limited itself to Anatolia in a way that could include the Kurds as well. Yet, the subject of the Ottoman Muslims would continue to be a topic of discussion in international politics until the end of the Lausanne Conference. In the new international regime established for the protection of minorities, led by the League of Nations, Turkey would ac-

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43 Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 112.

44 Quoted by Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Dr. Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981), 321.

45 Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Dr. Abdullah Cevdet*, 319–320.

46 "*Osmanlı Islam Ekseriyetiyle Meskun*" was the term used in the document.

cept only "religious" minorities resisting the notion of "ethnic" minorities, emphasizing the unity between Kurds and Turks.[47]

3.2. An Effort to Utilize Wilsonianism: Political Organizations in Postwar Turkey

The circulation of the Wilsonian ideas was not restricted to discussions about different opinions and positions of intellectuals and politicians on the future of the Ottoman Empire or Turkey. Many political organizations (or parties) were also founded by the intelligentsia during the postwar period, mostly emphasizing the key term of "Wilsonian principles" in their programs. As can be anticipated, both the aims of these organizations and the ways in which they employed the Wilsonian ideology differed substantively from each other. However, the majority of them believed that these principles could give the most favorable result for Turkey from their own standpoints. In order to achieve this, these groups used tactics similar to organizations and groups of other countries: they petitioned President Wilson, sometimes sent protest notes, and organized meetings both in and outside of Turkey. Although the Wilsonian Principles League represents an apogee of Wilsonian excitement in Turkey, there were also other organizations that tried to utilize these principles through the means mentioned above.

For instance, an association called the *Millî Kongre* (National Congress) which was formed in 1918 in Istanbul by a group of intellectuals and politicians, aimed to act as an umbrella organization for many political parties as well as institutions, such as the Faculty of Letters, the Medical School, the Society for the Employment of the Ottoman Muslim Women, and the Turkish Hearths.[48] The National Congress tried to prove the existence of a Turkish majority in Thrace and Anatolia by providing statistics based on the understanding of self-determination. It also published books in French such as *La Turquie Devant le Tribunal Mondial* in order to challenge the anti-Turkish propaganda abroad.[49]

Similar to the National Congress, *Vahdet-i Milliye Heyeti*, (the Committee of National Unity) was founded in Istanbul in March 1919 under the leadership of Ahmed Rıza, the renowned intellectual of the Young Turk movement during

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[47] For more information about these discussions in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, see Taha Akyol and Sefa Kaplan, eds., *Açık ve Gizli Oturumlarda Lozan Tartışmaları, TBMM'de Lozan Müzakereleri Tutanakları* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2014).

[48] Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 145–156.

[49] Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 151.

the Hamidian era. The Committee's statement started with a comparison that was obviously written by Ahmet Rıza himself. According to the document, while the French Revolution had given rights to the humankind through the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizen, the revolution that the First World War brought was the Wilsonian Principles that aspired to provide the nations with their sovereignty rights.[50] In this sense, Ahmed Rıza explains in his memoirs the aim of the Committee as showing Turks' national capacity to the international public and unifying the national forces (*kuvva-yı milliye*), counting on the fair implementation of the Wilsonian Principles.[51] When this was not realized, as exemplified by the occupation of Izmir by Greeks, he sent protest telegrams to President Wilson.[52] The Ottoman government in Istanbul, specifically the Grand Vizier Damat Ferit Paşa, thought that the Committee of National Unity was composed of the Unionists, thus increasing its pressure on the Committee and Ahmet Rıza. In May 1919, he moved to Paris, continuing to work there extensively on the promotion of the Turkish National Movement with which he was in contact.[53] It is important to note that Ahmed Rıza was also active in setting other associations into motion. He had requested that other organizations send some delegates to Europe in order to work on the proper implementation of the Wilsonian Principles. For example, the Social Democratic Party (*Sosyal Demokrat Fırkası*), which considered itself linked with the Second International, was one of these organizations that accepted the demand of Ahmet Rıza.[54] This example demonstrates two important aspects. First, the Wilsonianism was a matter on which different organizations were cooperating with each other. Second, in a very similar fashion to the aforementioned case of Italian socialists, a political party in Turkey highly influenced by the Bolshevik Revolution could determine one of the aims in the foundational documents as "to enable the country catch up with the necessities of the time under the guidance of the Wilsonian Principles."[55] These initiatives that were initiated by the Ottoman/Turkish intelligentsia disclose that Wilsonian understanding had a greater influence on Turkey than has been apprehended until now in the relevant scholarly literature. This brings us to the case most frequently emphasized of Wilso-

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50 Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 446 – 447.

51 Ahmed Rıza, *Anılar* (Istanbul: Yeni Gün, 2001), 101.

52 Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 441.

53 Malkoç states that Ahmed Rıza moved to Europe at the request of Mustafa Kemal Paşa. Eminalp Malkoç, "Doğu-Batı Ekseninde bir Osmanlı Aydını: Ahmet Rıza Yaşamı ve Düşünce Dünyası," *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları* no. 11 (2007): 124.

54 Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 230 – 231.

55 Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 232.

nianism in Turkish historiography: The Wilsonian Principles League, which had been founded in December 1918, closed within two months. Tevetoğlu argues that although the life of the League was quite short, its impact was extensive, mostly referring to the discussions concerning 1919 and the demand of the American mandate by the former members of the League.[56] However, as this chapter has demonstrated so far, Wilsonianism was debated by broad segments of the intelligentsia, independent of the mandate matter.

The most influential members of the League included well-known intellectuals of the late Ottoman/early Republican Turkey: Halide Edib, Celal Nuri, Ahmed Emin (Yalman), Refik Halid (Karay), Yunus Nadi, Necmettin Sadık (Sadak), and Ali Kemal. These members were journalists, writers, and politicians, with distinct political orientations. Apart from their ideologies, their leanings toward the Turkish National Movement were distinct from each other as well. Yet, it should be noted that some of the influential members of the League had a cultural affinity with the United States. For example, while Halide Edib had graduated from the American College for Girls in Istanbul, Ahmed Emin had received his PhD degree at Columbia University. Likewise, Refik Halid was at the time of the formation of the Wilsonian Principles League a resident fellow at Robert College in Istanbul. This connection gives a good explanation for the reliance of the former two specifically on both Wilson and the US as it is visible in their writings of the period.

The main aims of the Wilsonian Principles League were set in its foundational documents as the realization of political and economic independence, earning the trust of the Entente powers as well as the US which was distrustful of the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, it aimed to come forward with a program that would be both acceptable to the Entente powers and the US and suitable to the self-esteem of Turkey.[57] This program would also include an invitation of an American committee to Turkey for radical reforms in the administration.[58] Parallel to these aims, the Wilsonian Principles League sent a letter to Wilson, demanding help from the Americans in order to reform the country. The letter included details on the type of help that was expected. One of these referred to the desire for American presence in Turkey for some 15 to 25 years so that necessary reforms in the areas of administration, justice system, financial and agricultural structures could be realized via American consultants.[59] Halide Edib, in her book *Tur-*

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56 Tevetoğlu, *Millî Mücadele Yıllarındaki Kuruluşlar*, 190.

57 Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 250.

58 Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 250; Erol, "*Türkiye'de Amerikan Mandası Meselesi*," 36 – 37.

59 "Wilson Prensipleri Cemiyeti'nin Itilaf Devletlerine Gönderdikleri Muhtıra," Yale University Mendell House Archive, 31/237, quoted by Erol, "*Türkiye'de Amerikan Mandası Meselesi*," 121.

key Faces West, writes that since the US was the only power with no territorial
ambitions on Turkey and that President Wilson showed a degree of justice to
the defeated powers, most of the "enlightened" Turks were thinking that the
US could help Turkey, explaining her rationale behind the Wilsonian Principles
League and the letter sent to Wilson, who did not respond.[60]

This letter triggered a debate in newspapers concerning the nature of the aid
to be expected. Two lecturers from *Darülfünun,* Mehmed Emin (Erişirgil) and
Ahmed Cevad (Emre) asked about the responsibilities of these American advi-
sors in *Söz* (Statement). Through many questions, they were drawing attention
to a paradox between the concept of self-determination presented by Wilson
and the demand of the Wilsonian Principles League for American advisors to
stay in the country for a long time.[61] Ahmed Emin wrote an answer to the ques-
tions posed by Mehmet Emin and Ahmet Cevat in *Vakit* (Time). According to him,
this invitation was not against the sovereignty of the state, but rather a means to
enable it because sustaining sovereignty and hoping for equality in the interna-
tional system without a certain level of development in terms of demography,
capital and governance was not realistic at all.[62] This discussion did not come
to an end quickly. On the contrary, it continued for a while in 1919, transcending
the intellectual battle of words that took place in newspapers or the Wilsonian
Principles League, since the League had already been dissolved. According to Tu-
naya, it was impossible from the very start to keep these people with different
ideological leanings together.[63]

This was the period during which the Turkish National Movement gained
pace in Anatolia. Under these new circumstances, the issue of the American
mandate had turned into a discussion on a political basis. Halide Edib, in her
later accounts, suggests that the initiative about American assistance had
come to an end because the US was favoring Armenians in Eastern Anatolia,
with the Muslims living in the region opposing such a scheme.[64] She also em-
phasized that Turks had understood that no help could be expected from any
power when they witnessed the occupation of Izmir supported by the Allied
powers, including also the US.[65] Indeed, since Wilson had also voted in Paris

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60 Halide Edib, *Turkey Faces West: A Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origin* (New
Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 174.
61 *Söz,* 20 December 1918, quoted by Tevetoğlu, *Millî Mücadele Yıllarındaki Kuruluşlar,* 176.
62 *Vakit,* 21 December 1918, quoted by Tevetoğlu, *Millî Mücadele Yıllarındaki Kuruluşlar,* 177–
179.
63 Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler,* 248.
64 Halide Edib, *Turkey Faces West,* 175.
65 Halide Edib, *Turkey Faces West,* 175.

in favor of the city's occupation by the Greek army, May 1919 became a turning point regarding the Wilsonian hopes in Anatolia. Actually, Wilson had inconsistently supported the idea that Greeks should seize extensive areas in Anatolia even if they did not compose an ethnic majority in those regions.[66] As a result, the intelligentsia started to express their disappointment through meetings and newspapers, stressing that the promises made at the end of the war based on the twelfth point of Wilson's Fourteen Points speech, were being destroyed by the victors.[67] This also coincides with the global decline of Wilsonianism after the gradual realization that the negotiations in Paris presented more or less the continuation of the old order instead of the development of a new one.

However, despite the dissolution of the Wilsonian Principles League, and Halide Edib's claim about the downfall of the initiative as a result of the occupation of Izmir, and the decline of Wilsonianism all over the world, both Halide Edib and Ahmed Emin continued to theorize and write about the necessity of receiving help from the Americans. Ahmed Emin quotes in his memoirs his earlier piece from June 1919 in *Vakit*. He wrote then that Turkey could not give up on its sovereignty and be subject to the mandate system that the League of Nations established, but could outdistance neighboring countries through a reform program that would utilize American specialists.[68] In a similar vein, Halide Edib, before later joining the Turkish National Movement in Ankara in 1920, wrote several letters to Anatolia, mostly to Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) Paşa explaining the logic of American help.

In 1919, the Turkish National Movement was organizing itself in Anatolia against the occupations that had taken place after the Mudros Armistice, through congresses under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Paşa. This period that drew on the scope and aims of the movement when the Western powers were still discussing the fate of the Ottoman Empire and the government was either ineffective for the occupations or against the resistance in Anatolia, was complicated due to the discussions on the best possible way to follow. The American mandate was also an option that was heatedly debated. It should be noted that around this time the British representatives in Paris were offering the US a mandate in Turkey in order to establish a buffer zone between its main enemy, the Bolshe-

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66 Paul C. Helmreich, *From Paris to Sevres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919–1920* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1974), 125.

67 For more examples of such discussions, see Mehmet Şahingöz and Vahdet Keleşyılmaz, "Millî Mücadele Dönemi Türk Basınında Wilson Prensipleri," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 12, no. 35 (1996): 357–378.

68 Ahmed Emin Yalman, *Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim* (Istanbul: Pera, 1997), 438–439.

viks and its area of interest, the Near East.[69] Thus, in that period, Halide Edib sent letters to Anatolia, suggesting that the only way to protect Turkey from the imperialistic ambitions of the Europeans was to secure the option of an American mandate that could ensure Turkey's territorial integrity.[70] According to Edib, Turkey would have non-Muslim minorities under all circumstances. Therefore, the American system, which did not depend on religion or nation, could keep the people together.[71]

These ideas were not specific to Halide Edib, given the fact that a group of intellectuals and politicians in Istanbul were sending such letters to Anatolia especially before and during the national congress in Sivas that would be held in September 1919. However, the nature of these discussions was different from those of the preceding year, this time mostly emphasizing the American mandate in Anatolia. All of them would end within a short period of time, not only because the Turkish National Movement would exert its power as an anti-imperialist movement, but also because it would be obvious for these intellectuals that the main interest of Wilson concerned only a possible mandate for the US in Armenia, while the US Senate anyway opposed to all such moves.

3.3. Another Side of Wilsonianism: The League of Nations for the Turkish Intelligentsia

These discussions that were made and organizations that were founded by the Ottoman Turkish intelligentsia focused more on the future of their country. This is not surprising for a defeated power that was occupied by the Entente armies just after the signing of the armistice. Therefore, it was the notion of self-determination and also the twelfth point of Wilson's Fourteen Points that drew the attention of intellectuals and politicians from a pragmatic point of view. However, one of the most significant components of the Wilsonianism that Wilson was more interested in than the other points concerned the formation of an international organization, namely the future League of Nations. This liberal internationalist project of the American president remained in the background in postwar Turkey. However, when it was problematized, the emphasis was made on the notion of equality regarding the League of Nations.

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69 Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002), 379.
70 For the letter, see Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk* (Istanbul: Alfa Yayınları, 2005), 74–77.
71 Atatürk, *Nutuk*, 74–77.

In this sense, the Wilsonian Principles League highlighted in its statute that one aim of the organization was to reach an advanced level of governance in order for the state to become an equal member of the League of Nations and a principal element in the international struggle.[72] However, Ahmed Emin wrote a pessimistic article in which he stated that even if Turkey were invited to become a member of the League of Nations, it would not be realistic to expect equality within this institution as the country was not ready for the membership given its terrible condition.[73] The tone of the article was compatible with the overall understanding of Ahmed Emin, who used to underline the underdevelopment of Turkey.

Political parties founded in postwar Turkey also put similar clauses on equality (*müsavat*) in their programs regarding the League of Nations. One of them, *Osmanlı Hürriyetperver Avam Fırkası* (Ottoman Liberal People's Party), which was founded by Ali Fethi (Okyar), a former member of the Committee of Union and Progress and a friend of Mustafa Kemal Paşa, had defined its aims as working with other nations for peace and civilization. Furthermore, he regarded the participation in the League of Nations and international arbitration as means to reach this aspiration.[74] This was a direct embracing of the Wilsonian liberal internationalist project, which was largely of secondary importance for the majority of the Ottoman Turkish intelligentsia of the era.

In fact, the most important initiative with regard to the League of Nations – even if not to Wilsonianism – was the formation of the association *Cemiyet-i Akvam'a Müzaharet Cemiyeti* (Committee of the Support to the League of Nations) in early 1922, just before the Turkish National Movement was victorious. Its founders were mostly university professors, such as Hasan Tahsin (Ayni) and Cemil (Bilsel), well-known writers like Yakup Kadri (Karaosmanoğlu), and women like Selma Rıza (Feraceli). The latter was among the first women journalists in Turkey and the sister of Ahmed Rıza. The majority of the members of this organization were linked with the Turkish National Movement – some of them also participated in the Lausanne Conference – although it was established in Istanbul. It was one of many associations supporting the League that had been founded in different countries across the world, making Turkey part of an international undertaking. The committee's aims were set as both national and international.

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72 Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler*, 249.

73 "Cemiyet-i Akvam ve Biz," *Vakit*, 17 February 1919, quoted by Cabir Doğan, "Cemiyet-i Akvam'ın Kuruluşunun Istanbul Basınına Yansımaları," *Osmanlı Medeniyeti Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2, no. 3 (2016): 43.

74 Üçer, "Mütareke Döneminde Osmanlı Kamuoyunda Amerikan İmgesi ve Tesiri," 128.

On the one hand, it wanted to enable the sovereignty and independence of Turkey and challenge anti-Turkish propaganda in the world. On the other hand, it aimed to play a role in the reorganization of the League, and express national opinions about the peaceful resolution of conflicts to an international audience.[75] It seems that the initiative was more about strengthening the Turkish position before a global audience, just prior to the last episode of the Turkish War of Independence, rather than supporting a liberal internationalist project that had already paved the way for peace treaties such as the Treaty of Sevres. After all, it would take Turkey approximately ten more years to join the League of Nations after the war's end, since Turkey in particular continued to feel ostracized in international relations throughout the 1920s.[76]

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I pointed out that there was a Wilsonian excitement in post-World War I Turkey very similar to other countries facing their own postwar crises, making the Ottoman Turkish intelligentsia part of a global phenomenon. I emphasized that Wilsonianism appealed to many intellectuals with different ideologies, indicating a broader engagement than the existing scholarly literature has demonstrated. Both the intellectuals and politicians in postwar Turkey interpreted Wilsonianism through the articles that they wrote, and set up their political aims and organizations in relation to Wilson's principles. These actors used methods such as petitioning the US president in order to succeed in their endeavors. It was quite understandable that they undertook most of these steps on the basis of a political and practical agenda instead of a totally intellectual one, given that the Ottoman Empire had been occupied by the Entente powers after the Mudros armistice.

However, while being engaged mostly for practical political purposes, the Ottoman Turkish intelligentsia that related to Wilsonianism through their actions or writings were also actively circulating an idea concerning a new international order. In addition, they evaluated, they shaped the ideas according to the necessities of their own polity. It was in this sense that the present actors allow us to connect the subject of Wilsonianism's Ottoman Turkish trajectory with the

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75 For more information about the Committee, see Serpil Sürmeli, "Cemiyet-i Akvam'a Müzaheret Cemiyeti: Türkiye'de Kuruluşu ve Prag Konferansı," *Atatürk Yolu Dergisi* 7, no. 25 (2000): 181–200.

76 Dilek Barlas, "Milletler Cemiyeti'nde Türkiye: Iyimserlik ve Kuşku Arasında," *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 14, no. 55 (2017): 98.

frameworks of Global Intellectual History. As discussions about the self-determination in postwar Turkey showed in this chapter, the very concept paved the way for the intelligentsia to develop, and think about, their visions concerning the future country to take shape amid the ruins of the empire. For example, questions about who would and could be included within the future borders of the country were connected not only to Wilsonian self-determination but also to the ideological currents of the late Ottoman Empire, just prior to the emergence of the Turkish nation-state. This shows the intersection of a global idea with the long-lasting local questions. At the same time, it exemplifies the restructuring of these questions with a new and global wording. Therefore, the analysis of Wilsonianism's Turkish connection serves at the same time as an instructive example that highlights how some ideas and ideologies in different contexts may create a fruitful discussion about both the global and the local.