Nationalities Papers (2022), 1–17
doi:10.1017/nps.2022.88

ARTICLE

The Repertoires of Religious Nationalism: The Case of İsmet Özel

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Abstract

This article problematizes the study of religious nationalism, which lacks conceptual, religious, and nationalist "seriousness." These problems of "seriousness" obscure the nature of religious nationalism as they overstretch and do not do justice to the concepts of religious nationalism, religion, and nationalism, respectively. Seeking for the nature of and a path to religious nationalism, it is suggested that the later writings of İsmet Özel, a well-known poet and public intellectual in Turkey, make an emblematic case for a religious type of nationalism, demonstrating not only religious seriousness with his Islamist ideology but also a central orientation to the nation through his exclusive focus on Turkishness and Turkey. In so doing, this article introduces a wide range of categories to specify the ways in which religious nationalism is operationalized and to measure the patterns of religious nationalism in an attempt to overcome the problems of "seriousness." It identifies and examines six main patterns in Özel's thinking and shows their interactions: religio-national identity, exceptionalism, religious territoriality, civilizational othering, sectarianism, and anti-secularism.

Keywords: religion and nationalism; religious nationalism; İsmet Özel; Turkish nationalism; Islamism

Introduction

The complex interplay of religion and nationalism has generated a vast amount of scholarly debate for the last few decades. It has been religious nationalism, a particular manifestation of this relationship, that has proved to be one of the most salient and contentious categories in the study of nationalism. Religious nationalism suggests an understanding of nationalism based primarily on religion or a synthetic form of nationalism with religion at its center. Although the concept was not substantially operationalized until the 1990s amid the modernist agenda of nationalism studies, it has started to acquire ever-increasing attention thenceforward, owing to the studies of Mark Juergensmeyer (1993; 1996; 2001), Roger Friedland (2001; 2002), and several others (e.g., Fox 2004; van der Veer 1994; Rieffer 2003). This has also become an attempt to question the conventional reading of the hostility or inconsistency between religion and nationalism, which mistakenly presupposes either a conditionality of the rise of nationalism on a decline/demise of religion or a functional equation of nationalism with religion, as Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006; 2010; 2016) well identifies.

However, the deep lacuna is "a set of evidentiary standards for establishing the empirical existence of religious nationalism that goes beyond the invocation of religious motifs and symbols in politics," as Anna Grzymala-Busse (2019) puts it. We will argue that the growing body of

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literature on religious nationalism is not without its limitations in terms of what we will call three problems of "seriousness," which prevents doing justice to the concepts of religious nationalism, religion, and nationalism, respectively. Briefly, the problems of seriousness refer to overstretching these concepts in a way that obscures their meaning and analytical operationalizations and turns religious nationalism into a catch-all category, lumping together a random collection of religious and nationalist components. These problems lead into a set of essential questions regarding religious nationalism. Is there a distinctively religious kind of nationalism? If so, what is the nature of religious nationalism, and what are its constitutive patterns and elements? To address these questions, this article offers a systematic understanding of religious nationalism through the ideology of İsmet Özel, who represents an understudied brand of Turkish nationalism and an oft-cited current of Islamism in Turkey.

The argument of this article is twofold. First, we suggest that the later writings of İsmet Özel make an emblematic case for religious nationalism, not only showing great interest in religious themes with his Islamist ideology but also attaching primary importance to the nation through his exclusive focus on Turkishness and Turkey. Second, in so doing, we also argue that the writings of İsmet Özel are not only representative of a religious kind of nationalism but also introduce a wide range of categories "to uncover discursive repertoires" (Koenig and Knöbl 2015, 9) of religious nationalism, to model the concept or to specify the ways in which religious nationalism is operationalized. This is to say that, analyzing the case of İsmet Özel, we submit a blueprint/framework to measure the patterns of religious nationalism in an attempt to overcome the problem of conceptual seriousness. Accordingly, drawing also on earlier works on religious nationalism, we identify in Özel's writings a set of six patterns: religio-national identity, exceptionalism, religious territoriality, civilizational othering, sectarianism, and anti-secularism. In what follows, we first discuss the problems of seriousness in the study of religious nationalism. Then, we offer a brief biography of İsmet Özel to contextualize his religious nationalist thinking. The following sections examine those six main patterns.

Problematizing the Study of Religious Nationalism

The study of religious nationalism suffers from an interrelated threefold problem of conceptual, religious, and nationalist seriousness. First and foremost, although a large body of literature has investigated religious nationalism in different cases, most studies rely on a rhetorical employment of the concept, with little or no analytical operationalization. As such, religious nationalism turns into an empty signifier. This is especially true for the pieces of area studies, employing the concept and its correlates in the analyses of potentially fruitful cases of religious nationalism, such as India (Ahmed 2011a; Hansen 1999; Varshney 1991), Pakistan (Ahmed 2011b; Varshney 1991), Indonesia (Simandjuntak 2021; Formichi 2010; Bourchier 2019), Malaysia (Barr and Govindasamy 2010), Burma (Gravers 2015), Sri Lanka (DeVotta and Stone 2008), Israel (Yadgar and Hadad 2021; Scham 2018; Inbari 2012), Turkey (Haynes 2010; Kaplan 2005), and the Balkans (Loizides 2009). They cite little, if any, from the literature on religious nationalism and barely offer analytical frameworks for the concept beyond the narrations and illustrations of what is considered as religious nationalism, apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Yıldız and Kizir 2022; Aghaie 2014; Ram 2008).

Several political scientists and sociologists also obscure the concept when they exclusively prioritize the correlation or causation between religious nationalism and a set of variables such as globalization (Kinnvall 2004; Annavarapu 2015), democratization (Antal 2008), anti-Muslim attitudes (Shortle and Gaddie 2015), and violence (Baber 2000), with little in-depth engagement with the concept of religious nationalism and its literature. Among them, a particular research program on American Christian nationalism (Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020a; Perry, Whitehead, and Grubbs 2021; Perry, Grubbs, and Whitehead 2020; Perry and Whitehead 2015; Whitehead and Perry 2015; Whitehead, Schnabel, and Perry 2018; Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018; Baker, Perry, and Whitehead 2020b; Whitehead and Perry 2020) brings some conceptual depth,

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building on a well-designed questionnaire to operationalize the concept.[1] However, it should still be noted that these studies focus more on the relationship between Christian nationalism and public stance on a variety of issue areas, such as science, interracial marriage, same-sex unions, and election behavior, reducing Christian nationalism to a variable of prediction, and much less on the literature of religious nationalism, turning American Christian nationalism into a *sui generis* case.

In any case, the problem of conceptual seriousness refers to an underdevelopment of the concept of religious nationalism. An indiscriminate overstretching of the concept renders religious nationalism an over-loaded category mixing an arbitrarily collected set of concurrent manifestations and components concerning religion and nationalism in a specific case. In this way, the concept remains open to dispute in that its parameters remain far from being patterned beyond the empirical coexistence of religious and nationalist components. It would be a truism to say that the concept of religious nationalism cannot hinge on whether religious items are substantially available in a particular case of nationalism and vice versa. For example, as one scholar carefully observes in the Turkish case, all significant stripes of Turkish nationalism, including the radically secular Kemalist nationalism, tender "their sanitized version of Islam in the making of Turkishness" (Aytürk 2014, 694). In other words, religious nationalism is neither "a nationalist movement with a few religious undertones" nor one that "may include aspects of religion in the national identity," but rather it is "stronger than that" (Barker 2009, 13).

It comes as no surprise that this problem of conceptual seriousness brings us to the question of what Liah Greenfeld (1996) calls the "religious seriousness" of religious nationalism.[2] This is to question the religiousness of religious nationalism, referring to an overstretching of religion and the religious. Doubting the analytical utility and ontological status of the concept, Greenfeld argues for the secular nature of nationalism, and states that what is presented as religious nationalism in a way that overstretches the concept of religion does not stand for a distinctive kind of nationalism. In her understanding, religious nationalism corresponds to the ethnic-collectivistic form of nationalism in most cases, which makes religion merely an ethnic and racial characteristic of ascription and inalterability. This is because these cases do not imply any "religious seriousness" and do not do justice to the concept of religion, with their "inattention to, and even ignorance and disregard of, basic religious (transcendental) principles" and "the commandments of the faith" (Greenfeld 1996, 186–188). She concludes that religion merely serves a function of a diacritical marker, "an outward sign and symbol of collective distinctness" and a tool for nationalist objectives in the absence of more cohesive propensities, ascribed from both within and without (Greenfeld 1996, 181–186).

In other words, religious seriousness means the incorporation of religion into nationalism beyond the merely identitarian and symbolic supplies of the religious – even though Greenfeld does not see such an incorporation within the realms of possibility. A cross or crescent on the flag or a reference to God in the national anthem does not stand for a religious kind of nationalism and "is seen in most types of secular nationalist discourse" (Aghaie 2014, 184). Therefore, one should look for a deeper engagement of nationalist actors with the public imperatives of religion to reorganize political and social life along religious lines. It would be plausible to reckon that if there is a distinction between religious identification and religious adherence (Coakley 2004, 217–219), the former does not make a nationalist movement a religious nationalist one. One should also take into account Geneviève Zubrzycki's (2012) operationalization of the distinction between religion and religious tradition that tries to avoid "a caricatured expansion of the concept of religion," with more emphasis on the latter as "a material and symbolic resource for identity buildings," although she does not discuss whether those nationalist imaginations building on their religious *tradition*s should be considered as religious nationalism. It is equally important to draw attention to her call for the further development of the concept of religious tradition "in order to avoid conflating the religious and the sacred" (Zubrzycki 2012, 452). In a similar vein, Gorski's (2010, 7; 2019a, 13–36) distinction between religious nationalism and civil religionism is also useful: "Religious nationalists wish the boundaries of the religious and political communities to be as coterminous as

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possible" while "civil religionists imagine the two spheres as independent but interconnected" (Gorski 2010, 7).

Relatedly, there is also the problem of what we prefer to call the "nationalist seriousness" of religious nationalism, a question raised by Rogers Brubaker (2012). Skeptical of the concept, Brubaker argues that religious nationalism is employed in an unhelpful way that overstretches the concept of nationalism. He usefully directs a substantial part of his criticisms at the Islamist cases of Friedland (2002) and Juergensmeyer (1993). Accordingly, he holds that the state-seeking agenda of the Islamist movements such as Hamas, regarded as religious nationalists, and their operation in and through the nation-state do not render them nationalist considering the inescapability of the nation-state as a modern political framework. Therefore, he concludes "If Islamism is a form of nationalism, it is a nationalism without a central role for 'the nation'" (Brubaker 2012, 14). Brubaker (2012, 14–15) also argues against the idea that "the *umma* constitutes a kind of nation" or so-called Islamic/Muslim nationalism as a "deterritorialized nationalism" in that it is not imagined in limited and sovereign ways without having a "polycentric or pluralist social ontology" and being the "ultimate source of political legitimacy."

In other words, nationalist seriousness is the incorporation of nationalism into religion beyond the imperatives of the nation-state and the analogical reasoning of scholars. In the present instance, the "religiousness" of actors in question is indisputable, but their "nationalistness" is considerably doubtable. Although Brubaker does not discuss non-Islamic cases, it should be noted that the scholarly examinations of those cases are often far from falling into this trap of overstretching the concept of nationalism. This is particularly true for a group of studies on American Christian nationalism, which offer a more nuanced account of such incorporation of nationalism into religion. For instance, Gorski (2019b) identifies four elements, namely racism, sacrificialism, apocalypticism, and nostalgia, in the composition of American Christian nationalism. In a similar vein, Gorski and Perry (2022) show that white Christian nationalists imagine the US and American nation as encapsulated by religion and ruled by Christians while simultaneously projecting white supremacism that "idealizes the power of white Christian Americans." Some investigations of Buddhist nationalism (Keyes 2016; Berkwitz 2008; Scott 2011; Foxeus 2019; Tonsakulrungruang 2021) also show the nationalist seriousness of their cases, but they are still not immune from the problems of conceptual seriousness discussed above.

To recap, the problems of seriousness obscure the potentially valuable contributions of the study of religious nationalism to nationalism studies. They overshadow the meaning of religious nationalism, which is understood as an eclectic amalgam of the religious and the national. An overstretching of these concepts results in both an underdevelopment and overinterpretation in the study of religious nationalism. Although some corrective steps can be found (e.g., Gorski 2019a; 2019b; Zubrzycki 2010; 2012; Aghaie 2014; Barker 2009), they are still far from directly addressing these issues. Given the interrelated threefold problem of conceptual, religious, and nationalist seriousness, the question is how the concept of religious nationalism can be operationalized and how a case of nationalism can demonstrate both religious and nationalist seriousness to be counted as religious nationalist. To this end, we offer the later corpus of İsmet Özel as an emblematic case of religious nationalism. A brief biographical description of Özel would contextualize his religious nationalist ideas and signify his relevance to the subject before discussing how he presents a refined example of religious nationalism.

İsmet Özel: Socialist, Islamist, Nationalist

İsmet Özel is a prominent poet and socialist-turned-Islamist/nationalist intellectual in Turkey. Born in 1944, he has been on the map of intellectual agenda in Turkey since his early ages. In the first place, he made a name for himself within socialist circles in Turkey from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, thanks to his revolutionary poems and magazine, namely *Halkın Dostları* (The Friends of People), a literary review. Choosing poetry, rather than politics and militancy, as his primary

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"battleground," Özel tried to promote "a progressive and revolutionary art" as part of a socialist anti-imperialist struggle (Guida 2014, 119–120). However, having published his poem *Amentü* (Credo) in Sezai Karakoç's *Diriliş*, one of the most prestigious Islamist journals of the time, in 1974, he announced his conversion to Islamism.

It was Özel's 1978 book *Üç Mesele: Teknik, Medeniyet, Yabancılaşma* (Three Problems: Technique, Civilization, Alienation) (2014b) that catapulted him into the top of the Islamist intellectual agenda in Turkey. *Üç Mesele* offered a set of paradigm-breaking critiques of modernity in the course of the Turkish Islamist thought, and in so doing, criticized several long-standing assumptions of Islamism in Turkey, such as developmentalism and civilizationism. One can even speculate that Özel's critique has more chronically affected the trajectory of Islamist thought in Turkey than the Iranian revolution has done. He also regularly, yet at intervals, wrote essays in *Yeni Devir*, *Millî Gazete*, and *Yeni Şafak*, three of the most popular newspapers of the Islamist movement in Turkey. As such, Özel became "the one Muslim intellectual" capable of appealing to "believers and secularists alike" (Meeker 1991, 211), particularly in the 1990s.

His extensive publishing activity has made Özel a well-known public intellectual and prime source of reference within Islamist circles since the late 1970s. However, he has severed his ties with the mainstream Islamism in Turkey, having declared "as I have not been comfortable with where you have stood, I am departing for somewhere else" (Özel 2018c [2003], 476). Accordingly, he has been primarily engaged with the issues of nationalism and offered his case for Turkish nationalism since the early 2000s, with a significant number of articles and books (for more on Özel, see Guida 2014; Morrison 2006; Meeker 1991; Toprak 1993; Karasipahi 2009; Dalacoura 2019). In this way, he has subsequently joined a significant trend of Turkish nationalism, namely a synthesis of Islam and nationalism, which has been a core theme of nationalism in Turkey since at least the 1950s.[3]

The nationalist content of these later writings diverges significantly from his early corpus, written between the late 1970s and the early 2000s, but an Islamist spirit is still in effect throughout these works. This study relies on an analysis of these later pieces by Özel. As is stated, we argue that these later writings are built on six main patterns, which also help us to operationalize the concept of religious nationalism with a high level of religious and nationalist seriousness: religio-national identity, exceptionalism, religious territoriality, civilizational othering, sectarianism, and anti-secularism. The following sections examine these patterns, respectively.

Religio-National identity

Religious nationalism is more than a selective borrowing from religious symbols, myths, and histories. It is "the fusion of nationalism and religion such that they are inseparable," as Barbara-Ann J. Rieffer (2003, 225) points out. It would be plausible to argue that at the core of this inseparability is the definition of national identity in that this definition often goes beyond a conscious selection of themes in creating a fusion between religion and nationalism. Özel offers an emblematic case of such inseparability when he defines a religio-national identity, which implies a co-representation of religious and national identities. As such, he defines "a variant of nationalism that constructs the nation, its culture, and its citizenry through Islamist symbols and concepts as the core constitutive elements" (Aghaie 2014, 182).

In the first place, what it means to be a Turk is contingent on Islam in Özel's account. He considers Turkishness and Muslimness as the two sides of the same coin, as there cannot be a Turkish identity without Islam as a religious identity. Building on an attempt to religiously sanctify the starting point of the nation, as Hastings (1997, 187–190) puts it, Turkishness owes its place to an Islamic identity for Özel. This is because, for instance, "Arabs were already Arabs before the Qur'an, but Turks became Turks thanks to the Qur'an" (Özel 2016a, 22) – an argument that will be elaborated in the following sections. It follows that "a non-Muslim cannot be a Turk" (Özel 2019a, 143). For example, he banishes the Gagauzians, considered popularly as "Christian Turks," from Turkishness: "They say that the Gagauzians are Orthodox Turks. It is not possible. There is no such

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thing as Christian Turk" (Özel 2015b, 26).[4] It is worth quoting at length to demonstrate his understanding of the religious conditionality of "true Turkishness":

> No one can say 'I am an atheist, but the independence of Turkey is the most important issue for me.' If he/she is saying so, he/she is lying. It is a lie: 'I am a Christian, I am a Buddhist, I am a Jew, I am a Brahman, or I am a Shamanist, but Turkey's independence is very important to me.' The importance of Turkey's independence is valid only before Muslims. (Özel 2018a, 19)

Against this backdrop, he rejects any definition of the Turkish national identity based primarily on ethnic, cultural, or tribal traits. Turkishness corresponds to a superior moral stance (Özel 2015a, 21; 2017b, 161; 2018a, 152–153, 205) or a value system, stemming from Islam (Özel 2017b, 47). This is to say that Islam would be the true characterization of the Turkish national identity. What makes it national is the Turkish way of understanding and performing religion, which also renders Turks unique among their coreligionists (Özel 2018a, 205). At its heart is a historical role undertaken truly by Turks for the sake of Islam: becoming and remaining "the sword of Islam" (Özel 2018a, 192, 240; 2015c, 21; 2016c, 38; 2017b, 47), and in so doing, being a faithful servant of God. Accordingly, he concludes that Turks owe the raison d'être of their national consciousness to following Islamic dogma, which provides them with unique qualities (Özel 2016e, 107; 2015b, 28).

If Islam is the central criterion for Turkishness, the latter also represents the highest standards of the former. This is to say that, apart from Islam's pivotal status in the definition of national identity, Özel (2019a, 82) also renders Turkishness a part of Islam. To this end, Özel describes any animosity towards Turkishness as an enmity towards Islam. This is because Turks are the only genuine representatives of Islam (Özel 2016e, 159), implying that religion and faith exist together in the same category of Turkishness. One cannot become a true Muslim without being like a Turk in that Turkishness represents the peak of the true religious adherence. When this superiority of Turks is not appreciated, the faith of Islam will be determined by non-Muslim authorities (Özel 2015d, 20). As non-Turkish Muslims typify deviation from the real cause of Islam or its underperformance, no authentic Muslim identity can exist other than the Turkish-Muslim identity (Özel 2016c, 16; 2021, 266). Özel even accuses those claiming Muslimness without Turkishness of "blaspheming against God" (2016e, 126) or argues that the denial of Turkishness is a sin (2017b, 29). It eventually comes as no surprise that this exclusivist understanding draws much on a myth of ethnic election.

Exceptionalism

If exceptionalism is broadly defined as a belief in the manifest destiny of one's kind, religious nationalism is particularly advantageous for drawing on an exceptionalist discourse or a myth of ethnic election. Indeed, such myths of chosen people are widely examined in a series of Christian cases (e.g., Hastings 1997; Gorski, 2000; Smith, 2003), though those may not necessarily correspond to a religious kind of nationalism. The "Muslim world" deserves more attention for examining religious nationalism's myths of chosen people although some (e.g., Aktürk 2022, 212) identify an absence of such myths in Islam. Islam is no less suitable to messianic tendencies than other religions are, and Özel effectively utilizes this suitability. Özel's exceptionalism revolves mainly around the argument that the Turkish nation has represented the historical and prospective embodiment of the purity and superiority of Islam. In other words, Turks have been the only special Muslim group as the most pristine and successful representatives of religion among the believers of Islam.

It should be, in the first place, noted that Özel's Turkish exceptionalism does not constitute a replica of neo-Ottomanism, which has remained paradigmatic within both Turkish Islamism and conservative currents of Turkish nationalism. Neo-Ottomanism presupposes a nostalgia for the perceived Ottoman grandeur, seen as the most powerful and authentic, and a prophecy of the Turkish leadership in revolt against the West, supposedly similar to the role of the Ottoman Empire (see Ongur 2015; Ergin and Karakaya 2017; Wastnidge 2019). Özel, in contrast, regards the epoch of

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the Anatolian principalities in the thirteenth century as the golden age of the Muslim and Turkish history, and offers a highly critical account of the Ottoman period in a way impossible to be found on the right of the political spectrum in Turkey. He describes the Ottoman Empire as "a culture of betrayal" (Özel 2019b, 58; 2018a, 118) and "a deviant order" (Özel 2019b, 155; 2018a, 286; 2016e, 62; 2016c, 43; 2017b, 191) in that it did not represent the true Muslim and Turkish identity and instrumentalized Islam for the sake of the personal interests of the ruling elite (Özel 2018a, 231, 395, 507; 2016c, 27; 2017b, 83).

To this end, Özel finds Turkish exceptionalism in the perceived pristine character and central role of the Turkish nation/people, rather than imperial grandeur. For one thing, he claims that Turks are the only ethnic community whose emergence and existence are contingent upon Islam (Özel 2016a, 22). This is to say that, in his own words, "it is only Turks that could gain its national character through being the sword of Islam" (Özel 2018a, 205; 2017b, 177). It follows that Turkishness has represented the "true Islam" in his understanding (Özel 2016e, 16). It is this religious genesis of Turkishness that has rendered them pristine. He finds a crystallization of the true Islam in this pristine character of Turks (Özel 2021, 161). He goes on to say that "Turks' emergence has been the completion of the process that started with the emergence of the Qur'an" (Özel 2019b, 261). In other words, Özel considers the Turkish nation as the culmination of Islam. These arguments perfectly conform to Anthony D. Smith's (1992, 365) observation that "the privilege of election is accorded only to those who are sanctified, whose life-style is an expression of sacred values."

It is this pristine character that has made Turks central. Above all, Turkishness is the center of Islam for Özel (2017b, 60; 2018c, 365) because it is the nucleus of Islam, and "history has bestowed Turks on Islam as its body (Özel 2018c, 167). He considers Turks as the key component of the "Islamic cause," and therefore, "if one recognizes his/her Muslim identity and ignores his/her Turkish identity, Islam is not a cause for him/her" (Özel 2016b, 20). Furthermore, Turks have historically gained this central position as "it is only Turks that have the honor of bringing down the Crusades" (Özel 2019b, 261) and "ended the devaluation of Islam after its initial period" (Özel 2019a, 260). They have become the soldiers of God insomuch that "there has been no nation in the world describing its army as '*peygamber ocağı*' [the heart of the prophet]" (Özel 2019b, 254; 2017a, 25). In the final analysis, Özel creates a myth of what can be called the "Turkish man's burden" (see Lapidot-Frilla 2009). For him, "Turks became Turks by taking responsibility for the Islamic *umma*" (2019a, 186). Building on his historical reading, he argues that "it is only Turkey that can bring the emancipatory potential of Islam" (Özel 2018b, 373), and therefore, it is necessary for Turkey to embark on an Islamic transformation.

Özel also presents his exceptionalist discourse as a covenant between the nation and God in a way that combines what Smith (2000, 804–805) calls as "missionary" and "covenantal" kinds of chosenness. While it is a given for the reasons mentioned above that "Turks were created superior to other nations" in missionary terms (Özel 2019b, 59,69; 2018a, 86, 295), he attaches this perceived superiority to a myth of creation. Accordingly, if Turks are superior to other nations, including fellow Muslim ones, it must be the result of God's will. As he claims that "God has promises to the Turkish nation" (Özel 2016c, 18), he emphasizes a "covenant" between the Turkish nation and God: Turks would have the privilege of being superior and servants of God, and in turn, they would protect Islam. This volition includes, for Özel (2017b, 110; 2021, 182), that "God created the Turkish nation and homeland as a measure against the domination of the infidel rule." It follows that "the Turkish lands have constituted a guarantee for the survival of the *umma*" (Özel 2016c, 10). This brings us to his conception of religious territoriality.

Religious Territoriality

An understanding of territory and territoriality occupies a central, and even constitutive, position in a multitude of nationalist projects, whether the delineated territory of each nationalism and nation

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corresponds to the boundaries of a state or not (e.g., Penrose 2002; Smith 1998). Its immediate implication for religious nationalism can be best related to the argument of Anthony D. Smith: "Where an *ethnie* is also a community of believers or a 'holy people' adhering to a single sacred lifestyle, repeated performance of sacred acts in fulfilment of the mission with which the community is entrusted sanctifies the land and turns it into a reward for faithful observance of a 'covenant'" (1999, 153). The homeland of his "holy people" is at the center of Özel's nationalist ideas. Although he relies heavily on an Islamist terminology in his invention of national homeland, which also attributes a high level of religious seriousness to his ideas, this nationalist delineation of territory diverges significantly from Islamism and the so-called "deterritorialized Muslim nationalism" mentioned above.

First and foremost, Özel's understanding of homeland revolves centrally around its constructed or invented character. In his understanding, homeland is expectedly historic, but he does not hold a conception of "immemorial homeland," which has always been as it is in the nationalist imagination. For example, one cannot find the classical tendency of many Turkish nationalists that views the steppes of Central Asia as the original and unoriginated homeland of Turks. On the contrary, he insistently deals with the questions of how the Turkish homeland, Turkey, was born and how it has remained so. This recognition of the constructed nature of homeland may unsurprisingly dilute his nationalism; however, he still reifies and naturalizes the nation and homeland and bypasses this problem by sacralizing it in directly religious terms and rendering the traits of this constructed nature as the essence of the Turkish nationalism and identity. In this sense, what Smith (1999, 151) calls "territorialization of memory" goes parallel with an Islamization of territory.

At the heart of this operationalization is the concept of *daru'l-İslam* (the House/Land of Islam), which refers, in Muslim jurists' classical legal doctrines, to the regions where the Islamic rule/law prevails.[5] Although some argue that a religious territorialization is "logically untenable in the case of proselytizing religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam" (Oommen 1994, 457), Özel mediates that religious concept through the nationalist notion of homeland, and vice versa. He ambiguously yet proudly describes Turkey as a historically and prospectively unique territory of *daru'l-İslam* (Özel 2016d, 20; 2019b, 159; 2016e, 56; 2018c, 350; 2021, 266). Importantly, he explicitly claims that "Turkey is our homeland because it is *daru'l-İslam*" (Özel 2018c, 45, 130), conditioning the essence of homeland on religious imperatives. Accordingly, homeland is sacred in a religious, not ethnic, sense, but it is still an ethnic homeland. For Özel (2018a, 284; 2014a, 21), the term *daru'l-İslam* connotes sharia rule, conquest, Islamic superiority and domination over infidels, and a hierarchy between Muslims and non-Muslims, perfectly represented and realized by Turks.

This characterization of homeland relies on his reading of Turkish history. Özel (2017b, 17) attaches the Turkish homeland-making to its Islamization when he regards Turks' homeland-making as a process of *daru'l-İslam*-making. In his understanding, Turks gained homeland by transforming the then foreign/infidel lands into *daru'l-İslam* (Özel 2016e, 81; 2019b, 225; 2019a, 71; 2018a, 142–144). It was the small Turkish principalities of the thirteenth century in Anatolia, which were eager to make jihad against the "infidels," that invented the Turkish homeland (Özel 2019b, 281; 2018a, 519; 2017b, 139; 2021, 101; 2016c, 12). In other words, the rejection of infidel rule and the expansion against it occupied a central position in the making of Turkey (Özel 2018a, 40). Özel considers this process so important that he argues "History was bended first by the emergence of the Qur'an, and second by the transformation of *Diyar-ı Rum*[6] into the Turkish homeland" (2019b, 75). Following its invention, the Turkish resistance against the Crusades and the maintenance of a truly (in fact, the truest) Islamic order characterized these lands, which remained a holy and respected homeland of Islam (Özel, 2018c, 45, 274; 2019b, 154, 242; 2018a, 57). In this way, "the ethnoscape becomes an intrinsic part of the character, history and destiny of the culture community" (Smith 1999, 151).

Eventually, Özel develops an understanding of the co-constitution of Turkish identity and homeland by equating Turks' homeland-making with their nation-building. He states that Turks did not constitute a nation before their arrival in Anatolia. There had been such ethnic groups as

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Turkmens, Uzbeks, and Tatars in Central Asia, but they transformed into Turks only in Anatolia thanks to the process of *daru'l-İslam*-making (Özel 2018a, 194). Building on the perceived importance of "the institution of conquest in the making of Turkishness" (Özel 2018a, 272), which rendered Anatolia a region of *daru'l-İslam*, he claims that "Turkishness was born in these lands," having realized a religious role (Özel 2018a, 153, 194; 2016e, 14). It concludes that "Turkey made Turks, and Turks made Turkey" (Özel 2018c, 131, 172; 2019a, 71; 2017b, 110). Turkish identity and homeland are so tight-knit that Turkishness cannot survive beyond the boundaries of Turkey, and Turkey cannot have meaning without the historical implications of Turkishness (Özel 2018a, 153, 205). As such, Özel gives a territorialized meaning, which has a religious raison d'être, to Turkish nationalism. After all, this discussion on territory reasonably connotes the religious frontiers of the nation, which Özel understands in civilizational terms.

Civilizational Othering

The complex relationship between civilizationism and nationalism has generated controversial arguments. Şener Aktürk (2022, 211), for instance, considers civilizational discourses as efforts to "transcend national identities and the nation-state through supranational visions of 'civilizational' identities and institutions." Rogers Brubaker (2017) offers a more nuanced and accurate account: Civilizationism can be understood as both "a new articulation of nationalism" with the content of national identity specified in civilizational language and "an alternative to it" with "the boundaries of belonging and the semantics of self and other" understood in civilizational terms (Brubaker 2017, 1211). Even when it appears as an alternative, "civilizationism does not supersede nationalism; it combines with nationalism," he concludes (Brubaker 2017, 1211). Although Özel does not appeal to a civilizational solidarity of the Muslim world in pan-Islamic terms, civilizationalism works for Özel in identifying the "significant others" of the nation. In this sense, civilizationism combines with his nationalism when he seems to project what can be called a reverse civilizationism.

Philip W. Barker identifies the presence of a religious frontier, and an actual or a possible threat from that frontier as the conditions "for national identity to become solidified around religion" (2009, 34–36). Relatedly, Özel operationalizes Turkey's status of "frontiersmanship" at the border of Europe in civilizational terms. Relying on a "survivalist, zero-sum security logic" (Magcamit 2020, 687), he describes Western civilization as the primary other of the Turkish identity. This othering stems from a civilizational master narrative, the historical enmity between Turks and the West: "Turks constituted a power that manifested itself against infidelity. We did not take on just one nation" (Özel 2015a, 21). As "this nation challenged the Western civilization for four hundred years" (Özel 2019b, 147), he insistently claims that "a Turk is the one who ventures on struggling against the infidel" (Özel 2019a, 186; 2016c, 58; 2018a, 63). It goes on to say that "Turkishness means the defeat of non-Muslim world" (Özel 2019a, 71).

Mutually, Turks are also regarded as the constituting "other" of the Western civilization (Özel 2017b, 106–107). Özel (2019b, 156) attributes a special place to Turks' standing and fighting against Western powers in the making of the Western civilization and identity, apart from the latter's impact on the making of Turkishness. For the Crusaders, the name of all their enemies was Turk (Özel 2017b, 170–171). This enemy was so terrifying that it was "Turko-phobia" that made Europe what it has been, and that European history is one of an effort to eliminate the Turkish threat (Özel 2019a, 84). This is to say that Western civilization was founded as a defense against Turks and Islam: "If the Western civilization is a civilization, it is thanks to its opposition to Turks" (Özel 2017b, 107). The Turkish other was so prominent for Europeans that the Renaissance became possible due to the success of, and threat from, the Turks (Özel 2018a, 229, 247). Similarly, the project of modernity and capitalism were also initiated to counterbalance Turks (Özel 2016c, 37–38, 76; 2017b, 166).

Moving from the past to the present, Özel expresses his anti-Westernism in anti-capitalist and anti-American terms. On the one hand, as Western civilization and capitalism have come to equal terms, the West has come to mean an economic domination system (Özel 2018c, 35–37). Because

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the Turkish nation represented a strong resistance against this enemy for a very long time (Özel 2018a, 298), the "other" of this exploitative system must be Turkishness with its Islamic purity (Özel 2018c, 76). On the other hand, Özel considers the US as the final phase of Western civilization, with Europe engulfed in Americanization. If the US dominates this capitalist world-system, the dichotomy must be between Americans and Turks (Özel 2016b, 21; 2018a, 299). Therefore, there are only two metaphoric options in the world: Americanization or Turkification (Özel 2018a, 82, 295; 2018c, 171). This is why he argues that the concept of Turkishness cannot be a matter of comparison between ethnicities. The term Turk can only be compared to the term American (Özel 2018a, 299). He goes on to say that if one is not a Turk, then he/she is an American (Özel 2018a, 82, 546). That said, his alarmist and rejectionist approach finds its voice not only in such inter-civilizational terms but also has intra-civilizational implications.

Sectarianism

Özel's religious nationalism is also a sectarian one. Indeed, although the term sectarianism has had an Orientalized meaning in a way that it is almost exclusively attributed to the Muslim world, not to the West, the relationship between sectarian and national identities has been much recognized (e.g., Greenfeld 1992; Zubrzycki 2006). This is because the sectarian identification of national identities is seen as a "standard practice in much of Europe" (Aktürk 2022, 209). Apart from such classical European examples, which often do not demonstrate any religious seriousness, it must be expected that religious nationalism is particularly prone to sectarianism. In this sense, Özel provides a useful case for the relationship between religious nationalism and sectarianism.

Özel stands for the Sunni branch of Islam. In his understanding, Sunnism is the system at the heart of the Islamic purity and superiority of Turks. He considers Sunnism as the core of the Turkish identity and a prime source of Turkish superiority over other nations, although he does not explain the dynamics of this source (Özel 2019a, 258; 2016c, 132). In other words, Özel's nationalism is mediated not only through religion but also through a specific interpretation of it. He explicitly claims that "Turkishness equals to Muslimness, and particularly, Sunnism" (Özel 2018a, 412). Therefore, for Özel (2018a, 483), any deviation from Sunnism would annihilate the Turkish nation. More to the point, he reduces the scope of his sectarianism to a school of Sunnism, namely Hanafism,[7] which he sees as the foundation stone of the Turkish identity (Özel 2016e, 16). In this sense, for Özel, Hanafism represents the true practice and interpretation of Islam, which has been best and longest realized and expanded by Turks. This is also to make Hanafism the tradition of the Turkish nation.

If this Sunni-centrism constitutes the internal boundaries of his sectarianism, there is a rejection of the legitimacy of other sects at its external borders. Özel mainly develops his sectarian animosity toward two non-Sunni communities: Shias, the historical counterpart of Sunnis throughout the world, and Alevis,[8] the minority side of Turkey's main sectarian cleavage. Özel makes no room for these communities in the Turkish nation. Instead, he openly excommunicates Shias and Alevis when he declares that "they are not Muslims" (Özel 2018a, 154, 189, 383, 505). When they are excluded from Islam, it follows that they cannot be a member of the Turkish nation. It is in this context that Özel criminally proposes a campaign for the Sunnification of Turkey's Alevis, which he views as a matter of life and death for Turkey (Timetürk 2009). In this way, he openly formulates a sectarian other for the imagination of Turkish nationalism.

Özel's emphasis on Sunnism and his anti-Shiism and -Alevism cannot be reduced to a discourse of identity. Instead, it attributes a high level of religious seriousness to Özel's nationalism in that he regards Sunnism in fundamentalist terms, which corresponds to the classical Islamist formulation of the return to the sources. This is to say that Özel operationalizes not only "religion-as-identity" but also "religion-as-doctrine" if we borrow the distinction of Fanar Haddad (2020, 128), a careful observer of sectarianism in the Middle East. In other words, both Shias and Alevis represent a high level of deviation from the original sources of Islam, while Sunnism stands for their protection in

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their original forms. This fundamentalism is a particularly good turning point to discuss his anti-secularism.

Anti-Secularism

Religious nationalism is an attempt to revitalize the religious through the national, and vice versa. As Roger Friedland (2001, 139) argues, it is "a form of politicized religion, one in which religion is the basis of political judgment and identity, indeed in which politics take on the quality of a religious obligation." Özel operationalizes "a religious master cleavage between the religious and the secular" (Gorski and Türkmen-Dervişoğlu 2013, 204) in his politicization of religion and formulation of nationalism. Nationality and religion are rendered inseparable not only in identity terms but also through an adherence to Islamic principles in such a way that Turkishness is devoid of meaning and existence beyond religious imperatives. When he shows a considerable amount of enmity towards secularism, "religiosity becomes a marker of who belongs to the nation and who is a 'true' member of the national community" (Grzymala-Busse 2019). This is to make "ideological correctness" a national trait (Zubrzycki 2012, 446; see also 2016).

For Özel (2019b, 64), Turkishness owes its existence to anti-secularism. The historical experience of Turkish states shows the central status of Islam in state affairs, with the Turkish nation living by the standards of religion and assuring the pure presence of Islam (Özel 2021, 239). This is also true even in the case of the Ottoman Empire, of which Özel is highly critical, as mentioned above. Although he does not regard the Ottoman Empire as a truly Islamic state in its economic and political order, he still asserts that the Empire was a theocratic state because, "without putting Islam as the defining characteristic of the state, there remained no definition for what the Ottoman Empire was" (Özel 2018a, 395). No matter how deviant it was, the Empire had to rely on the popular religiosity of the Turkish nation and the public visibility of Islam to survive.

That said, there are two elementary issues in which this enmity towards secularism becomes particularly visible: a critique of government policies deviating the state from Islam, and a related belief in an international conspiracy that has alienated Turks from religion. For one thing, Özel believes that the Republic of Turkey was established as a "Qur'anic state" in that it reassured the superiority of Islam in the face of infidels after a long period of decadence. However, the republican reforms and coup d'états distracted the Republic from its true path (Özel 2016c, 107). The founding elites' reform agenda "made the creation of a high culture impossible and destroyed any opportunity one by one" in this direction by drifting apart from Islam (Özel 2018a, 511). To this end, Özel accentuates a "chasm between the illegitimate state and the 'real' religious nation" (Grzymala-Busse, 2019).

In fact, those secular reforms were part of a broader international conspiracy for Özel. What he calls the "lords of the world-system," the hegemons of international system, charged the Republican elites with deviating Turks from Islam (Özel 2021, 225). One of the most crucial interventions of these lords of the world-system was the coup d'état of May 27, 1960, until when the Republic was still a "Qur'anic state" in Özel's account. Although one might excuse the secularist reforms of the founding elite for countering the penetration of international actors, the coup d'état constituted a real turning point in the trajectory of secularism in Turkey. This is because it "turned everything inside out" and launched the process of the full integration of Turkey with the imperatives of the world-system and a secular lifestyle (Özel 2016c, 107). In this sense, anti-secularism also functions in the same way of what Gorski (2019b) calls the apocalypticism of American Christian nationalism. As such, secularism is not only a disaster for the Turkish nation but also a plot to destroy it.

Conclusion

This study is an attempt to inquire into the nature of religious nationalism. It builds on three main problems of "seriousness" in the study of religious nationalism: conceptual, religious, and

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nationalist seriousness. It suggests the later writings of İsmet Özel as an emblematic case for religious nationalism. When analyzing the case of Özel, it offers six main ways to form significant linkages between religion and nationalism: religio-national identity, exceptionalism, religious territoriality, civilizational othering, sectarianism, and anti-secularism.

First, religio-national identity implies the strongest form of the inseparability of religious and national identities. That said, this inseparability might not necessarily take the shape of religio-national identity. Özel particularly creates such a strong fusion when he offers an almost co-constitution of religious and national identities. Second, exceptionalism assigns an otherwise-unattainable quality and power to the nationalist project. In so doing, it implies a particular kind of embodiment of religion in the nation. Özel's religious nationalism revolves centrally around an exceptionalist discourse on Turks, who represented the most successful and pristine form of Islam in his account.

Third, religious territoriality is a particular fusion strategy as territory can be religionized in many forms for nationalist purposes, such as an emphasis on sacred sites. Özel opts for a strategy of religious territoriality in the absence of such religious symbols. As such, he utilizes a strong Islamic term, *daru'l-İslam*, in his understanding of homeland. Fourth, civilizational othering is fertile ground for examining the interplay between civilizationism and nationalism. Civilizationism may not necessarily incorporate a solidarist conception of one's own identity in civilizational terms, but rather it may be at work through seeing the "other" in such grand collective terms. Özel's civilizational othering relies on anti-Westernism and anti-Americanism, and in so doing, he brings a civilizational identity against a national identity in consolidating the nexus between religion and nationalism.

When it comes to the relationship between sectarianism and religious nationalism, it must go beyond "the formation of national identities along sectarian/religious cleavages" (Gorski and Türkmen-Dervişoğlu 2013, 203). Most cases of a sectarian-national nexus are more of a historical path dependency than of a religious nationalism. Özel makes a conscious effort to highlight the Sunni branch of Islam and to excommunicate non-Sunnis from both Islam and Turkishness. As such, he draws on a seriously fundamentalist reading of Islam. Last, anti-secularism can also be seen as a crosscheck of religious nationalism's religious seriousness. One can infer a set of themes of such seriousness from several arguments presented throughout the article, but anti-secularism has also an independent value. This is because anti-secularism is the grammar of religious nationalism.

In the final analysis, beyond a complementary or borrowing relationship, religious nationalism implies a reciprocally reinforcing relationship between religion and nationalism (Grzymala-Busse 2019). The incorporation of religious elements is not "identitarian," to borrow from Brubaker's "identitarian Christianism," in which "Christianity is embraced not as a religion but as a civilizational identity understood in antithetical opposition to Islam" (Brubaker 2017, 1193–1194, 1199–1200).

A final question might be how these six patterns relate to each other in projecting a religious kind of nationalism. Above all, what ties these patterns is a double processing of the religious and the national: a religionization of the national and a nationalization of the religious. This is to say that these six patterns not only give a religious meaning to the nation but also come into possession of religion by nationalizing it. However, this double processing does not say much about why and how these six patterns are specifically the case. One can rely on a number of propositions to explain the relationship between these patterns.

For one thing, a religious definition of national identity is one of the strongest indicators of a "serious" case of religious nationalism. As long as the distance between the religious and the national in this definition reduces, the levels of religious and nationalist seriousness upscale. Özel's equation of Turkish and Muslim identities is an attempt to erase such distance. However, while it is straightforward for nationalism to move through difference from other societies, religion often implies or establishes a relationship of similarity with coreligionists. Therefore, it is not easy for such equations to smoothly function. Exceptionalism appears as an otherwise-unattainable discursive

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stock to overcome this problem. Exceptionalist discourses consecrate one's own group supremacism while unconsecrating coreligionists. The Islamic centrality of Turks renders other Muslims secondary at best and inferior/incomplete at worst in Özel's account.

Similar to exceptionalism, territorialization is yet another solution for the smooth functioning of the fusion between religious and nationalist identities. Notably, it delimits the religious within a nationalist framework. Özel significantly employs an Islamist terminology in delineating the nation, but confines it to national boundaries. Given such strong levels of the penetration of the religious into the national in defining the nation, it comes as no surprise that the primary "others" of religious nationalism also mirror religious boundaries. Civilizational othering not only underpins a religious definition of national identity with its religiously foreign "other," but also combines with an exceptionalist and a territorial discourse by magnifying the mission and unique place of the nation. When national identity and territory are so exceptional, it is concordant to transform civilizational/religious cleavages into a conflict between the national and the civilizational, superimposing nationalism upon civilizationism. Özel effectively formulates a narrative of a civilizational clash, led by Turks.

When it comes to sectarianism, one should note that religious nationalism is often, if not always, a sectarian type of nationalism. Sectarianism not only can walk along with a religious definition of national identity and an exceptionalist discourse by projecting the true interpretation of religion, but also might provide nationalism with a codification of religious dogma. Özel formulates a highly exclusionary and fundamentalist discourse when utilizing sectarianism. Finally, even when those five patterns discussed above are understood in identitarian terms, anti-secularism is an umbrella dimension to pattern those modes. A secular incorporation of religious symbols into nationalism often does not generate a religious kind of nationalism, and therefore, anti-secularism is often implicit in and surrounding of other patterns. In Özel's understanding, a secular Turk is void.

To conclude, what is presented in this article is an ideal type of religious nationalism. We do not argue that this combination of six patterns is the sole path to religious nationalism. There might be several ways of fusion between religion and nationalism, which further research might illuminate.

Acknowledgements. We would like to thank Professor Zana Çitak for her comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this article. Her encouragement is also invaluable.

Disclosures. None.

Notes

1 In these studies, Christian nationalism is measured through attitudes toward how the federal government should promote Christian public visibility, such as allowing prayer in public schools and the definition of the US as a Christian nation.
2 Our expression "the problems of seriousness" is inspired from this usage of Greenfeld.
3 For more on the synthesis of Islam and nationalism in Turkey, see Aytürk (2014), Çetinsaya (1999), Uzer (2016), Yıldız and Kizir (2022), and Türkmen (2021).
4 The complex interplay between religion and nationalism in the making of the Turkish national identity also draws scholarly attention in the field. For instance, such scholars as Ceren Lord (2018), Barış Ünlü (2018), and Soner Cagaptay (2006) identify a centrality of Sunni Muslim identity in the process of nation-building in Turkey. A prime example is the Turkish-speaking Greek-Orthodox Karamanlıs, who were excluded from the Turkish nation on the basis of their Christian religious identity.
5 The concept of *daru'l-İslam* should also be understood in relation to *daru'l-harb* (the House/Land of War). The former stands in opposition to the latter, which corresponds to the lands of non-Muslim rule and the potential target of Islamic expansion through jihad and conversions. See Parvin and Sommer 1980.

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6 *Diyar-ı Rum* is a contested concept. According to Cemal Kafadar (2017, 38–42), while it is habitual to equate *Diyar-ı Rum* with Anatolia for many historians, its classical usage covers both the Balkans and Anatolia, referring to the sphere of (East-)Roman geographical and cultural zone.

7 Hanafism is a legal school of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence. It has been known for its "liberal" and "rationalist" religious interpretations, with its emphasis on precedent and reason. Such important dynasties as the Seljuks and the Ottomans are commonly associated with Hanafism. Compared to other three legal schools, namely Hanbalism, Shafiism, Malikism, it has arguably the largest number of followers in the "Muslim world," constituting the majority in several countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Central Asia. See Campo 2009.

8 According to Ayfer Karakaya-Stump (2018, 54), Alevism incorporates the mainstream Shia attachment to the Twelve Imams, a close affinity with Sufism, a number of pre-Islamic mystical traditions, a non-observance of formal obligations of normative Islam, and a distinct liturgy, the *cem*. She states that "the vast majority of Alevis today live secular lives and consider Alevism primarily as a cultural rather than religious affiliation" (Karakaya-Stump 2018, 54). Rıza Yıldırım (2017, 19) also notes that it is complicated to conceptualize Alevism due to the multiplicity of Alevis' theological interpretations and worshipping practices, and the contested variety of academic definitions.

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Cite this article: Yıldız, T. and Çengel, E. 2022. The Repertoires of Religious Nationalism: The Case of İsmet Özel. *Nationalities Papers*: 1–17, doi:10.1017/nps.2022.88

https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.88 Published online by Cambridge University Press