

BETWEEN CHIEFTAINCY AND KNIGHTHOOD: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE OTTOMAN AND THE SAFAVID EMPIRES

INTRODUCTION

The Iranian and Turkish revolutions of the early twentieth century, and in particular the Islamic revolution of 1978-9 in Iran, identify a basic tension in the cultural program of Islamic civilizational processes, a conflicting trajectory of historical processes, which led one nation to establish a religious state (Iran) and the other a secular one (Turkey). In the case of Turkey, the so-called “Young Turk Revolution” of 1908 and the Kemalist movement of 1919-23 gave way to the proclamation of a Turkish secular republic in 1923. Regarded as the ‘proto-type of Near Eastern military coups’ of the twentieth century (Rustow, 1953:513), the 1908 revolution, by taking target the values of the Ottoman *ancien régime*, was essentially a military elite revolt which became victorious with the dethronement of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1879-1909).¹ In the case of Iran, the constitutional revolution of 1906-11 and the Islamic revolution of 1978-9 were predominantly political insurrections buttressed by popular mass support with strong features of eschatological ideology of radical revivalism and utopianism.² In retrospect, recalling Tocqueville, the basic ‘esprit révolutionnaire’ of the two cases would require us to search for disparate historically dependent processes that underlie these divergent outcomes.

The following discussion, in all due brevity, is an attempt to trace and to uncover the

historical political processes which have given rise to certain distinct cultural resources that are embedded in the two countries. As I will try to show here, the history of these two divergent revolutions can be traced back to the complex political life of the Anatolian Sufi-knightly culture of the Turko-Persian ecumenical age in the eleventh century Islamicate history, which ultimately led to the establishment of the Ottoman and the Safavid empires. The notion of ‘Sufi-knightly culture’ indicates here a set of symbolic social imaginaries that involves the creative blending between the mystical transcendental sense of reality, Sufism, and the knightly code of ethics, which emerged into prominence as a political movement in the Middle Period of Islamic history.³ More precisely, I argue that the establishment of these empires identifies the crystallization of two distinct types of Sufi-knightly cultures, defined here as knightly-heroism (Ottoman) and millenarian-populism (Safavids). The basic difference in the pristine cultures of both Ottoman and Safavid Sufi-knightly orders --and what I propose to examine in this paper-- lies in the distinct socio-organizational types of political alliance, defined here as frontier-chieftaincy (Ottoman) and sectarian-chieftaincy (Safavid). Towards the end of this paper, I will allude to the ethos of knightly-heroism (Ottoman) and millenarian-populism (Safavid) as long-term socio-cultural, structured processes of development that have continued to prevail in history, despite the dissolution of the Sufi-warrior classes as a consequence of sedentarization processes manifested in the Ottoman and the Safavid empire formations from the fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries.

Attempting to engage in a comparative study of the Ottoman and the Safavid empires with world-conquering aspiration in respect to their specific forms of chieftain political cultures ultimately means embarking upon a broader spectrum of tasks. Here I do not

therefore pretend to provide either a comprehensive or a systematic comparative treatment of these two empires, and the subsequent paths of their divergent yet connected political histories. Nor do I intend to offer an analysis of the historical-institutional formation of the modern Iranian and Turkish nation-states based on the Ottoman and the Safavid histories. Given the constraint of space, my ambition in this paper will be limited to sketch out general resemblances and discrepancies between the two Islamic empires by investigating their distinct cultural traits sustained in socio-political organizational patterns.

THE TURKO-PERSIAN ECUMENIA OF THE MIDDLE PERIOD

Recalling the thesis of the late Marshall Hodgson, the Middle Periods (945-1503) of Islamicate history represents a civilizational shift of major importance. Whereas the period of genesis (c.600-945) saw the replacement of Syraic and Pahlavi ('Irano-Sematic') by Arabic culture of post-Axial age of agrarianate citied life, underpinning the emergence of an inclusive Muslim community between the Nile and the Oxus river, the Middle Period, in contrast, signaled a widening gap between state and society, the diffusion of Sufism and the expansion of Persian as a literary language that extended across the Afro-Euroasian landmass (Hodgson, [1961] 1974).⁴ In a posthumous article published in 1970, Hodgson addressed this period as an age of great cosmopolitan creativity that reached its height by the sixteenth century, when the large part of Islamdom came under the control of (Moghal, Safavid and Ottoman) empires administrated by military patronage states, marking the fifth phase of Islamicate history, namely, the era of 'Gunpowder Empires' (Hodgson, 1970).⁵ In contrast to the

conventional academic notion of a ‘period of decline’ after the collapse of the High Caliphate, Hodgson’s periodization of Islamic history offers us an alternative historical account by showing the ways in which the Islamic culture underwent a considerable transformation of civilizational identity from the tenth to the sixteenth centuries.⁶

Although a critical study of Hogdson’s system of periodization is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is also reasonable to argue that the impact of the Turkish migration to Asia Minor played an integral role in shaping new patterns of socio-cultural crystallization in the Middle Period history of Islamdom. The successive waves of Turkish migration from the steppe grass lands of Inner Asia to the settled regions of Anatolia and Irano-Mesopotamia plateaus occurred in the ninth century when heavy recruiting of Turkish slaves had been undertaken to create a new a military elite order, loyal to the Byzantine and the early Caliphate state.⁷ It was with the Persianized Turkish military slaves, like the Almoravids (1056-1147) and Ghaznavids (977-1186), representing the ‘high culture’ of the Caliphate elite stratum, that new military slave states emerged with the breakdown of the High Caliphate political order. The Seljuq suzerainty in the eleventh and the early twelfth centuries, however, marked the establishment of the first Turkish nomadic empire that led the way to the revival of Orthodox Sunnism. In this case, the establishment of a non-military slave form of Turkish imperium with world-conquering aspirations illustrates the appearance of the first major nomadic conquest movement with religious revivalist dimensions.

It was with the gradual process of Turkish migration to the Anatolian regions beginning in the eleventh century that saw an era of major demographical transformations. This occurred in two successive historical phases. The Seljuq victory

over the Byzantines forces at the battle of Manzikert in 1071 inaugurated the first decisive stage of the Turkish migration with distinct political importance: the establishment of Turkish-speaking principalities in the western borderland marches as a way to challenge Byzantine control over Anatolia.⁸ This socio-demographic process, namely known as ‘Turkicization’ (Levitzion, 1979: 3-4), saw its second phase of development with the Mongol invasion of 1258, which intensified the Turkomen migration to the western regions of Anatolia, replacing the Greek-Christian peasant people with the migrating Turkish nomadic population (Ménage, 1979: 52-67). Though sporadic Turkish migrations were underway throughout the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, the fourteenth century highlights the finalization of a major demographical shift in Anatolia that involved radical changes of socio-cultural significance.⁹

The transition from the early to the late Middle Period seen in the successive Turkish migration to Anatolia can be regarded as a period of revolutionary force in two important ways. On one level of abstraction, the complex process of hybridization of Arabic, Persian and Turkish cultural elements, from the end of the High Caliphate to the establishment of Ilkhanate era, identifies a new period of creative cosmopolitanism, namely known as the ‘Turko-Persian ecumene’ (Canfield, 1991: xiv). The Turko-Persian Islamicate culture that flourished under the Samanids and the Qarakhanids in the eleventh century, and was later exported to various regions of the Eurasian landmass, provided composite intracivilizational complexes of shared culture. In the particular case of the Turkicization of Anatolia from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, the region produced a creolized ambience of cultural fluidity in terms of ethnicity and religious identities in the context of agrarian rural, nomadic tribal and sedentary urban settings.¹⁰

The blending of Arabic-scriptural, Byzantine-Greek, Turkish-nomadic and Persianate-lettered traditions of the Middle period paved the path to the creation of new cultural complexes.

On another level of abstraction, this ‘mixed borderland civilization’ (Wittek, 1966:20) also became a meeting point of variant religious complexes. In this sense, the blending of steppe (instrumental) religious practices of the Turkish nomads with the universal (soteriological) religions of Irano-Semitic and Byzantine-Greek societies represents the crystallization of new cultural milieus, wherein nomadic and settled civilizations had to some extent been amalgamated.¹¹ Since the eleventh century, the greatest expression of this syncretistic process was the appearance of the Anatolian-Sufism, in its distinct shamanistic form of Dervish Islam (or bâbâ Islam), as a dominant aspect of the daily life of the Turkish nomadic population, and indeed the main factor for the conversion of rural Asia Minor to Islam. The advent of Sufiesque heterodoxies, sectarian and millenarian movements through out the Middle Period can be, partly, credited to this process of religious syncretism, in which Shi’i and Sunni ritual practices and creeds intermingled in close proximity and at times overlapped in the wavering spaces of everyday interaction.¹²

But it was with the emergence of the Turkish Sufi-knightly brotherhood orders-- the so-called ‘Ghazi’ warriors-- that gave a political expression to this civilizational fusion.¹³ The origins of the Sufi-knightly associations could be traced back to the urban-based “pure brethren” of the Qaramati movement, which played a great role in the development of the Islamic guilds in the tenth century (Lewis, 1937), and the Futuwwa associations that were revived under the reign of Caliph al-Nasîr in the late eleventh and early twelfth

centuries, as a consequence of the expansion of trade and revival of towns under the Seljuq rule (Arnakis, 1953: 234; Hodgson, [1961] 1974: 125-31).¹⁴ In the early Middle Periods, these relatively autonomous movements, as popular militia and volunteer Sufi-guild associations, played a crucial role in the local governance of the Islamdom. Ceremonial and militant in character, the prominent symbolic resources of the *Futuwwa* associations consisted of a complex ethical code of egalitarianism, in form of Dervish fraternities, and non-egalitarian charismatic elitism, in form of master (*pîr*) and patron relations. Ties of blood and kinship affiliations were less important as competition for the sacred status of leadership in the clubs, manifested in the paradoxical notion of ‘first among equals’, reflected the knightly-spiritual makeup of the associations. Accordingly, the egalitarian ethics of the guild orders, where spiritual devotion and group solidarity marked the ritualistic characteristics of the brotherhoods, identified the chivalric and heroic aspects of the associations (Lindholm, [1996] 2002: 29-30).

In the post-Mongol era of the Islamic history, the late Middle Period, the *Futuwwa* associations began to merge with the Anatolian-Sufi orders (Lewis, 1937:27-8), a process that spread in the Islamdom well into the fourteenth century. The synthesis between the *Futuwwa* and the Anatolian-Sufi orders created the *Akhîyat al-Fityân* or *Akhîs* movements, which tended to fuse the horseback warrior culture of Inner Asia with the sedentary Irano-Semitic Messianic traditions.¹⁵ Built around the ethos of steppe heroism and the Quranic notion of justice, the brotherhoods lived by a strict code of honor, enmeshed in a culture of reverence for spiritual sacred personas (shaman) and belief in the potential to unite the mundane with the supernatural world through ritual, ceremony and, above all, war.¹⁶

FRONTIER-CHIEFTAINCY: THE OTTOMAN CASE

The so called ‘Ghazi thesis’-- proposed by the late Austrian historian, Paul Wittek, which explained the original Ottomans as holy warriors-- has come under serious attack in recent years. For Wittek, the Ottomans were those march-warriors who attacked and overran the frontier lands between the Byzantine and Saljuq empires that primarily relied on the ideology of religious war (Wittek, 1966; 1982, 285-319).¹⁷ The Ghazi tradition of Anatolia, inherent to earlier Islam, constituted the basic ideology of ‘Holy War’ for the Ottomans, which ultimately identified the frontier culture of a spiritual warrior society.¹⁸ But part of the difficulty with this thesis, as Rudi Linder has argued, is that by placing too much emphasis on the Islamic dimension Wittek neglects aspects of the Inner Asian politics, the ‘shamanistic’ tendencies inherent to the early Ottoman frontier principalities (Lindner, 1983: 105-12). Wittek ignores, he argues, certain heretical religious practices, like the rituals of human sacrifice, which played an important role in the early Ottoman society.¹⁹ In addition, Wittek fails to provide an account of the inclusive and tolerant characteristics of the early Ottoman conquerors. This point ultimately dismisses the ‘Ghazi thesis’, since an ‘adversary ideology’ would have excluded Byzantines from joining the Ottoman forces (Linder, 1982: 2). Using the anthropological literature on tribes, Lindner further argues that the early Ottomans were a tribal political group whose membership should be defined not in terms of exclusivist religious zeal but by wide-ranging shared interests of its heterogeneous members (Linder, 1983).

On the other hand, Cemal Kafadar has criticized both of these approaches that the simple dichotomy between an Inner Asian and Islamic realities overlooks the ambiguous

cultural reality of the early Ottoman society (Kafadar, 1995). Relying on solid evidence, Kafadar invites us to see the early Ottomans as something complicated with ‘even contradictory behaviors’ (Kafadar, 1995: 12), in which an explanation for the ‘origins’ should be sought. Following Kafadar’s point, we are able to make up a composite history of the early Ottomans as a manifestation of ambiguous elements of quasi-corporate organization of tribal-nomadism coupled with the Ghazi spirit of the heterodox frontier culture, which came under the rule of orthodoxy as the Ottomans eventually established a centralized administration through build-up of military, taxation and urbanization. It is important to note that the term ‘Ghazi’ used here does not refer to an exclusive adversary ideology of ‘Holy War’ against an infidel enemy, but rather the Sufi-knightly hybrid culture of the Anatolia in the Middle Period. In this sense, the early Ottomans should be defined as a frontier-chieftaincy entrenched in a Sufi-knightly culture of honorific culture. This can be explained on two levels.

First, the rise of the Osmanili dynasty to power as a frontier military force in the fourteenth century between the Byzantine and Seljuq empires, where it was one of the many petty and semi-autonomous Turkoman principalities in western Anatolia, represented a distinct form of principality regime that was built around the chief as the source of charismatic authority. The status of the early Ottoman chief was earned by victory in battle, and his authority depended upon accomplishments in the struggle for expansion. The main cause of the success of the principality in a quest for supremacy in the frontier peripheries rested on the charismatic authority of the chief and his elite warriors, empowered through the ritual derive for the conquest of new territories and the incorporation of the civilization of the conquered lands into its own growing chieftaincy.

In a way, this notion of associational organization defies the Ibn Khaldunian exclusivist definition of tribal organization based on mere kinship and religious feeling (### asabiyya).²⁰ As Ira M. Lapidus has argued, the founder of the Ottoman dynasty did not rely on an ancestry ideology of lineage (though later it was fabricated to be so), but the agglomeration of diverse groups, including the Byzantine defectors, whom the chieftain united based on shared interest for military expansion (Lapidus, 1990: 33-4).

What is the relationship between chieftaincy and tribe? Tribes, Lapidus defines, ‘are not familial or ethnic groups but political and religious chieftaincies whose composition varies greatly’(Lapidus, 1993: 27). They are primarily composed of groups of tribes that are heterogeneous in culture and politically united under a central authority, the chief (Tapper, 1983: 9). Understood in this sense, the Ottoman chieftaincy includes the recruitment of new followers among local tribes and the conquered principalities based on the personal prowess of a centralized chieftain authority and his elite warrior class. This in fact can best explain the Ottoman success in expansion, conquest and, ultimately, sedentarization, as it accommodated diverse ethnic and religious groups into a flexible, resilient and enduring world empire.

Second, the chieftaincy aspect of the early Ottomans can also be described in the peculiar culture of an inclusive Sufi-knightly order, namely known as the Akhi association as explained earlier, united in the mystical values of love and warrior ethos of bravery, independence and, above all, honor. While deeply disciplined in the codes of honorific spiritualism with a strong heroic antipathy to submission and defeat, the early Ottomans were composed of male warriors who formed alliance and gave allegiance to the absolute authority of their spiritual guide (*bâbâ*), conceptualized as a living

embodiment of the supernatural world as the protector of the community.²¹ In a historical sense, the Sufi aspect of the Ottoman chieftaincy found expression in its close ties to the Bektâshî order, which later played a central role in the formation of the spiritual band of ‘slave soldiers’, namely, the Janissary corps (Birge, 1937: 46-48; 74-75).

Perhaps the most significant aspect inherent to the early frontier-chieftaincy was its ostensible hierarchical organization, a feature that continued to prevail in the Ottoman society until the new property-holding class began to challenge the strict social codes of distinctions in the second half of the seventeenth century (Abou-El-Haj, 1991: 49-51). The rank of relation to a unified though stratified chieftaincy, which divided the chief and his warriors from the subjects, expressed the importance of hierarchy and internal differentiation among the tribal members. This social organizational trait appears to have become more prevalent in the consolidation of the ideology of dynastic lineage, in terms of patrilineal decent, with the increasing sedentrazation of the Ottoman chieftaincy through expansion and war in the fourteenth century.²² Grounded in a set of strict ceremonial and ritualistic codes of conduct that separated the knightly military cast from the rest of the population, the Ottoman elites, with the Sultan at the head, governed their conquered territories as heroic protectors and guardians of the chieftain community.²³ This cast-like system of course may appear to pose a problem for the egalitarian spirit of the Sufi-knightly order which the Ottoman frontier-chieftaincy, as I have explored here briefly, was founded upon. But in fact the early Ottoman Sufi-knightly order was deeply rooted in the ethos of expansion, incorporating the culture of honorific competition to maintain division and rank among its confederate members and, above all, conquered subjects. Moreover, the hierarchical feature of the Ottoman chieftaincy, in a way,

highlights the strong centralization tendencies inherent to the Ottoman politics which paved the way for empire-building processes in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries.

These two points should ultimately explain the expansionist and militaristic dimension of the Ottoman empire with its hierarchically structured military alliance, wherein the entire imperial administration constituted the army- at least until the reign of Selim III (1789-1807) when reforms inaugurated radical changes in the structure of the Ottoman military (Shaw, 1965). It can also shed light on the cultural dimension of the Ottoman empire-building processes, especially after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, with the consolidation of the military fiefdoms (timar) and the ensuing civilizing patterns to construct a collective imperial identity. To be sure, these dimensions display both ambiguous features of expansionism and cosmopolitanism: whereas the former can be identified with the chieftain politics of frontier warlike culture, the later can in turn be linked to an inclusive culture of knightly-heroism, grounded in the ethos of bravery, independence, loyalty and self-abnegation.

SECTARIAN-CHEIFTAINCY: THE SAFAVID CASE

The causes that led to the proclamation of Twelver Shi'ism (Ithna-ashari) as the state religion of Iran by Shah Ismail I (1487-1524) at the congregational mosque of Tabriz in 1501 have a complicated history, which an account would go beyond the scope of this article. But for the most part, a brief historical background in the ascendancy of Ismail I to power will be necessary for a better understanding of the Safavid chieftaincy, and its distinct cultural and social organizational traits that set it apart from the Ottoman form of chieftaincy.

The origins of the Safavids can be traced back to the Sunni-Sufi order (1301) of the mystic Shaykh Safi al-Din (d.1334), whose status as the spiritual head (*pîr*) of the order coined the name 'Safawiyya', or the Safavid.²⁴ The Sufi order evolved into a messianic sectarian (*Ghulât*) movement with the succession of Shaykh Junayd (1459-60), during which it underwent a momentous transformation from the contemplative inner-worldly Sufism to the openly outer-worldly heterodox 'extreme Shi'ism' (*ghuluww*).²⁵ The evolution of the Safavids from a quietist to a militant revolutionary force in the fifteenth century, in a sense, represents an escalation of the hybridization process between the Inner Asian and Irano-Sematic civilizations. On one hand, the old shamanistic beliefs continued to be blended with the extremist Shi'i conception in the notions of divine incarnation of God in man and the Christian belief in the trinity (Moosa, 1988: 40); on the other hand, though closely related, the fusion of certain Shi'i extremist practices with the Sufi belief in the mystical nature of reality saw the appearances of new heretical movements and militant millenarian orders, which sprouted in the Islamdom in the fifteenth century.²⁶

There are two main reasons behind these civilizational hybridization processes. First, beginning in the thirteenth century, the *laissez-faire* approach of the Mongol rulers to religion led to the increase in number of religious heterodoxies that continued to spread well into the fifteenth century.²⁷ The period produced a fluid ambience of mixed religious practices between Christianity, Sufism, extreme Shi'ism and Sunni Islam that allowed veritable explosion of Sufi movements with pro-Shi'i tendencies. Second, the centralization of the Ottoman chieftaincy into an empire with the consolidation of Sunni orthodoxy under the reign of Bayazid I (1360-1403) led to an increase in the persecution

of the heretical religious movements, expanding throughout the Ottoman provinces (Inalcik [1973] 1988:188). This process was a complement to the development of the new taxfarms as a source of revenue for the centralizing Ottoman empire, measured mainly against the peasantry and the semi-nomadic groups. Even though insurgencies by Dervish Turkoman groups, like Bâbâ Âshîq movement in 1241, existed in the first half of the thirteenth century, the dramatic rise of revolts in the fifteenth century expressed stubborn resistance to the Ottoman oppressive policies to subdue the nomadic heretical forces that roamed the peripheral regions of the empire. This also signified the strengthening of revolutionary movements from diverse set of grass-root chieftain groups, calling for the creation of alternative worlds with renovative visions, utopian and eschatological ideals.

It is at this crucial historical juncture, I argue, that the chieftain and sectarian identities mixed to form the grass-root religious-political aspect of the Safavid revolutionary movement. Seen in this context, the Safavid chieftaincy was composed of recruited followers of the Safavid Sufi order among the tribal groups (known in Inner Asia as Oymâqs or ‘tribes’) that originated from diverse places like Anatolia, Syria and the Inner Asia (Tapper, 1974: 342). Known as the Qizilbash or ‘redheads’, named after their knightly red caps with twelve folds representing the twelve Shi’i Imams, the followers of the Safavid order also consisted of Turkoman nomads, descended from the Saljuq Ghuzz Turks, that faced persecution by the Ottomans.

In broad terms, the Safavid Qizilbashi movement, in its early extremists and revolutionary phase, was political in nature, representing the last bid for power of the Anatolian and Caspian regions, which had always resisted Islam in its centralized and orthodox form. The political aspect of the Qizilbash reflected the aspirations of the

original Shi'i political militant character, by recognizing the prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali, and his decedents as the head of the Islamic community. But the mystical elements, such as supernatural qualities attributed to Ali and his decedents as the source of esoteric nature of reality, inherent to the movement underlined a sectarian dimension with strong sentiments of opposition to Sunni orthodoxy- which the Ottomans and their allies in Inner Asia, the Uzbeks, ultimately represented. In a way, the movement was also a radical religious movement of heterodoxical nature with the revolutionary derive for alternative visions and strong revivalist elements in opposition to existing order. These dissident elements often entailed very strong eschatological dimensions that distinguished the Safavids as a sectarian movement par excellence.²⁸ In contrast to the frontier type of Ottoman chieftaincy in that religious belief was ultimately instrumental for struggle against the Christian infidels, the sectarian aspect of the Safavids involved certain beliefs in the heretical creed of reincarnation (*tanâsukh*) and the return of deceased to the world in various forms (recalling certain practices of spirit-possession); it also included the belief of transmigration and the oneness of sacred spirit joined in the body of prophets and saints, which the Sufi spiritual guide best embodies.

On one hand, the chieftain dimension of the Safavid Qizilbash order highlights a type of *oymâq* political organization with 'territorially bounded collectivity of groups' (Tapper, 1990: 68), inclusively heterogeneous and composite, which coalesced agricultural, pastoral and commercial (trade) economies under the charismatic leadership of an urban-based chief (Reid, 1978; 1979).²⁹ On another hand, the Safavid chieftaincy also involved the additional aspect of sectarian element of belief in unified charismatic leadership in a single chief, recognized as the divine source of sovereignty. The centrality

of a charismatic chief fused with the heretical notion of transmigration of divine spirit through different human bodies (Babayan, 1994: 136) adds a unique sectarian religious dimension to the Safavid chieftaincy; a dimension that is absent in the Ottoman case of frontier chieftaincy with its emphasis on spiritual ethos in terms of defense of religion through heroic action.

In its basic form, the Safavid Qizilbash warriors differed from the Ottoman Ghazis primarily, I argue, in their type of religious-political structure as a grass-root dissident association with strong heretical tendencies. This popular, grass-root aspect of the association is most apparent in the origins of the movement, as a Sufi order that was supported by the peasants, tribal orders and disenchanted groups in the Islamdom. In the fifteenth century, when the movement was gaining momentum and size, most of its followers came from the countryside and the towns, with the nomadic Turkoman composing an important part of the Safavid movement (Petrushevsky, 1985: 316). The grass-root element of the Qizilbash further reflects the movement's egalitarian feature of authority. As Kathryn Babayan has shown, the Qizilbashes, in their revolutionary stage, maintained a conception of authority based on the notion of 'corporate sovereignty' that recognized the sharing of political functions among the members- regardless of gender differences. This feature largely represented the steppe element of egalitarian basis of authority, which increasingly came under the threat of erosion as the movement began to evolve from chieftaincy into a sedentary empire (Babayan, 1998: 349-381). The share of power among the tribal members, however, did not overshadow the sacred leadership of the chief; it only implied that such notion of authority operated in more egalitarian manners, with less stratified elements than, say, in the case of the Ottoman chieftaincy, as

a frontier military order with strict set of hierarchical relations among its members. Although the gradual process of hierarchization also transformed the Safavid chieftaincy into an increasingly stratified imperial order, the movement was never based on the hierarchy of distinction. The tradition of love for the spiritual guide marked the way to join the mystical unity of spiritual reality on equal basis, becoming one with the supernatural world in unconditional devotion for the Sufi pîr.

It is, however, in certain distinct cultural patterns central to the Qizilbash identity formation, its symbolic resources in struggle for power, that distinguishes the Safavid chieftaincy from the Ottomans.³⁰ This Sufi-knightly cultural character of the Qizilbash warriors-- especially evident in their extremists stage of development when they entered the battlefield unarmed with the belief that Ismail's supernatural power would protect them from the enemy (Babayan, 1994: 135)-- combined the Ghazi spirit of spiritual war with the shamanistic practices of exocannibalism, decapitating the enemy's body for consumption (Arjomand, 1981a: 6). This sense of hybrid Sufi and steppe cultures, grounded in a sectarian revolutionary zeal, appears to have expanded under the rule of Junayd when the emerging Qizilbash warriors began to fuse the devotional practices of reverence for the Sufi master with the Shi'i belief in a messianic figure. With the merging of the ethos of honor with the custom of devotion for the chief as the sacred-persona in the fifteenth century, the Safavid movement clearly distinguished its knightly culture from the Ottomans. In a sense, the apocalyptic beliefs in the end of the world, coupled with the populist yearning for redemption through self-sacrifice, gave the Safavid culture its special flavor of Sufi-kighthood.

Heretical by rejecting the notion of resurrection in the belief that divine spirit can

transmigrate into different bodies through out time, and populist in terms of political protest against the establishment, the Qizilbash form of Sufism manifested a type of knightly ethos that entailed strong sentiments of dissent, sentiments such as independence, protest and devotion to the cause of justice, as the symbolic source of revolt against status quo. This strong feature of protest evolved around the Shi'i devotion to a symbolic source of sacred leadership that at the same time reflected both the plurality of authority, in terms of 'corporate sovereignty', and the singularity of chieftain sovereignty with the belief in the messianic sacred-persona. Such ambiguous arrangement in the Qizilbash value system, therefore, involved both egalitarian and hierarchical dimensions that underpinned a multiplicity of symbolic meanings embedded in the Safavid political structure.

State-formation and the Pacification of the Sufi-knights

Despite their different types of chieftaincies, elements of remarkable similarities lie between the Ottomans and the Safavids. The two empires both identify similar patterns of inclusive political organizations, which allowed them to evolve into sedentary empires by combining political and religious aspects in the development of distinct chieftaincies; they also relied on strong sense of Sufiesque knightly ethos of honor, independence and struggle to generate political movements with militant characteristics .

In a broad comparative perspective, and in contrast to the Western knighthoods that emerged in the High Medieval times, the Ottomans and the Safavids did not evolve in respect to the restructuring of an established nobility into a military elite order in

appropriating certain elements of aristocracy (Arnason: 2002: 128). And in contrast to the Japanese samurai warriors, the Ottomans and the Safavids did not primarily rely on the honorific culture, as a symbolic system of stratification and the expression of ‘collective elitist discipline’ (Ikegami, 1995: 11). As I tried to show in the previous two sections, the formation of these two imperial powers is embedded in the intricate cultural composition of semi-nomadic politics and ‘popular’ (or unofficial) cultures, rooted in the cultural blending of steppe shamanistic, Shi’i, Sufi and Sunni religions, as the basis for the crystallization of distinctive forms of chieftain political orders. Furthermore, the development of the two chieftain imperial orders can only be recognized in the context of the Middle-Period breakthrough of various chieftaincy orders, unique to Islamic historical trajectories.

Furthermore, it is in the complex process of sedentarization and the formation of a centralized imperial state that additional elements of similarities arise. The underlying critical features of the Ottomans and the Safavids are those state-building processes that transformed the two chieftaincies into sedentary empires in patterns of close proximity. First, in both cases, there was a systematic and violent attempt to subdue the roaming bands of Sufi-knights, in their respective Ghazi and Qilizbash forms, and displace them with state-organized professional armies. The Ottomans, especially under the reign of Bayazid in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, replaced the Ghazi warriors with slave soldiers, the Janissaries, as the newly established military class dominating the sultanate until 1826, when they were replaced by the newly organized army during the tanzimat era. The development of fiscal centralization in the form of the new tax system (timar) and land tenure was institutionalized with the expansion of the bureaucratic-

military order, which established the land-holding cavalry, who held prebendal fiefs under the supervision of the sultanate in exchange for military service. Similarly, the Safavids, especially under the reign of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629), ruthlessly disintegrated the original Qizilbash warriors and replaced them with a Georgian slave army (*ghulâms*). The emergence of a military slave-state under the reign of Abbas I came to represent the first organized military prowess of the consolidated Safavid empire, which increased the significance of the royal court by bringing the Qizilbashi fiefdom under the shah's control by using the land revenues to pay the salary of the new military.

In both cases, the institutionalization of slave armies represented the first advanced military order to accentuate administrative power and replace the warrior classes of the pre-empire chieftaincies. In close connection with the policy of detribalization, the imperial orders emerged with the dwindling influence of the original Ghazis and the Qizilbashes at the courts of the Ottoman sultan and the Safavid shah. The move was designed to increase the domination of the state, but also to annihilate dissent from the independent and wandering original spiritual warriors that continued to challenge the centralized empires in their formative stages of expansion. On the state-bureaucratic level, the policy further signified the increase in the routinization of the original charismatic force of the Ghazi and the Qizilbash Sufi-knightly orders with the impersonalization of power, as a consequence to the bureaucratization and the centralization of the chieftain regimes. The proliferation of the military institutions reflected the gradual increase in the integration of the territorial boundaries (territorialization). War and the preparation for war involved the advancement of armies and military technologies for domination in the interstices of competing empires on a

global scale, in which the Ottomans and the Safavids both actively participated. In brief, the expansion of the coercive means with the military tenor of the empires entailed radical changes in the original political structures of the chieftaincies with the domestication of the original independent spiritual warriors in place of an organized military force loyal to the shah and the sultan.

On a symbolic organizational level, the institutionalization of a centralized orthodoxy marked a crucial stage in the disintegration of the Ottoman and the Safavid heretical religiosity. In the Ottoman case, the process of establishing a Sunni orthodox legal order occurred from the early fifteenth to the late sixteenth centuries. In particular under the rule of Mehmet I (1413-21) & II (1421-51), the creation and the consolidation of the office of shaykh-al-Islam initiated the gradual eradication of the frontier heterodoxies in place of an orthodox institution under the supervision of the sultan (Pixley, 1976). The Safavids too, beginning with the officialization of Shi'ism in 1501 until the consolidation of a centralized state under the reign of Abbas I in 1591, initiated the institutionalization of orthodoxy by supporting the migration of the Shi'i ulama from Arabic Iraq and Lebanon into the learning centers of the empire (Arjomand, 1981b;1984).³¹ The increasing power of the 'sharî-minded' ulamas at the court, a process that was finally consolidated under the reign of Shah Sulayman (1666-94), advanced a long-lasting shift away from Qizilbashi sectarianism towards a Twelver Shi'i puritanical and hierarchical religious order (Babayan, 1996). In short, the bureaucratization of the religious sphere not only signified the consolidation of a centralized state under the rule of the shah and the sultan, but also indicated to the systematic subjection of non-official religions that identified the original Sufi-knightly culture of the early Ottoman and the Safavid

chieftaincies.

Though the domestication of Ghazi and Qizilbash warriors occurred in long and bloody struggles involving civil wars and periodic rebellions, whereby the forces of the settled military slaves eventually triumphed over the roaming warriors, the original Sufi-knightly cultures were rechanneled in diverse ways to shape the symbolic basis of the two sedentarized empires. The civilizing attempt to domesticate the Ghazis and the Qizilbashes, I argue, involved the gradual systematic disassociation of the original spiritual warriors from the Sufi-knightly cultures. This mainly occurred by means of state-led construction of new city-spaces and the institutionalization of rituals, ceremonies and customs in the crystallization of new collective identities. In this regard, the Sufi-knightly cultures were reshaped in the newly evolved imperial cults of knightly initiation rites (Ottoman) and the millenarian rituals of death and redemption (Safavid) that demarcated the symbolic domains of the integrative and normative imperial collectivities.³²

With the collapse of the empires in the early eighteenth (Safavid) and the early twentieth centuries (Ottoman), the emergence of new political institutions and the crystallization of new civic associations drew heavily upon the symbolic resources of the Sufi-knightly traditions in order to legitimate their own political vitalities. Whereas knightly-heroic culture played a central role in the establishment of the Turkish republic in its imaginary significance of the militant heroic derive to protect the nation from external threats; the tradition of millenarian-populism in the post-Safavid Iranian society surfaced in the mass-based political movements, especially, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the eschatological imaginary idiom of struggle against

‘oppression’. The two cultures, however, shared a critical feature in the formation of modern Iran and Turkey: the ethos of independence and self-determination, reminiscent of the warrior nomadic consciousness to relentlessly resist control and domination.

CONCLUSION

In its basic agenda, the difficult task of historical sociology is to produce broad theoretical statements in macro-historical terms, consciously relying on concepts, suspected affinities and associations in historical events. A comparative analysis is an essential part of this process insofar as making generalizations by applying concepts to a phenomenon or phenomena in a set of cases. The challenging part of this approach, however, is to construct general comparative arguments about history without relying on a totalistic and reductive narrative.

In this spirit, this article, condensed and generalized, was written as an attempt to compare the Ottoman and the Safavid empires, while acknowledging the difficulty of identifying a reducible element of divergence and similarity for a conclusive analysis. Throughout this study, I have taken pains not to downgrade the identity of the two empires in terms of their professed allegiance to Sunni (Ottoman) and Shi’i (Safavid) Islams. A study of that sort, I contend, would ultimately miss the very complicated inter/intracivilizational macro-historical trajectories that have played an integral role in the creation of the two empires; it would also ignore the divergent patterns of cultural idioms embedded in their respective political orders. Also, in a way, by emphasizing the Sufi-knightly cultural dimensions of the early Ottoman and the Safavid chieftaincies, I argued how the gradual domestication of the chieftain warriors classes was closely tied to

the state-building processes; processes that conditioned the construction of new collective identities that were in turn deeply influenced by the Sufi-knightly cultures.

It should be noted that the original Sufi-knightly ethos were not the only cultural paradigms that enabled the Ottoman and the Safavid empires to emerge as particularly pertinent to the post-Middle Periods of the Islamic history. Although they played prominent roles in the formation of state and processes of nation-building, in broad historical terms, it is best to view these cultures in the context of vying ethos, agon of values on a global scale, which render a nation an imagined community. To be sure, competing ethos have emerged in new indeterminate spaces of interpretation to reject, overlap and fuse alternative symbolic orientations and practices with the knightly-heroic and the millenarian-populist cultures, tending to create new cultural paradigms as a result. It is, therefore, in those spaces of indefinite cultural fusion, spaces of intertwining ethos of action and imagined and symbolic idioms that the Ottoman and the Safavid spiritual knightly cultures have continued to play a decisive role in the creation of new political orders and civilizational complexes. It is in those spaces between the imaginings and their (reinterpretable) symbolic idioms and institutional settings that new realities emerge and form (Catoriadis, 1997:392-3).

The legacy of the Ottoman and the Safavid Sufi-knightly cultures is still alive to this day. Although the Ghazi and the Qizilbash warriors dissolved as a consequence to distinct state building processes, the influence of their chieftain warrior cultures, in shaping institutions, social movements and everyday realities, continues to course through Turkish and Iranian societies. In the early twentieth century, the rise of Atatürk to power in 1923, as the father (bâbâ) of the newly established Turkish (secular) republic,

is a fascinating reminder of the Sufi-knightly culture of reverence for the heroic knight, as the protector and the guardian of the community of moral and supermundane qualities. Similarly, the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini to power in 1979 in form of a popular (quasi) messianic leader of the new Islamic republic under the name of ‘Imam’ is a good example of the ways in which the ethos of millenarian-populism has found a new expression in the modern Iranian politics. In a latter article I shall expand upon the historical transformation of the Iranian and the Turkish cultural organizational structures and its relation to set of distinct state-building processes from the early seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. I shall also discuss in more general terms the changing faces of these two cultures in the historical context of the state and society relations, which ultimately helped to shape the Iranian and the Turkish revolutionary nation-states.

Just what the future of these cultures in the two countries is, is unclear. The military’s use of knightly-heroic ethos, with its secular Jacobin tendencies, remains a powerful source of constraint to the consolidation of democracy in Turkey. Likewise, millenarian-populism, in its modern Shi’i nationalistic form, remains a prevailing symbolic source of protest, redemption and struggle against the present hierocratic autocracy in post-revolutionary Iran, as the recent developments of popular protests to perpetuate a democratic polity best demonstrate. The fate of the two countries surely depends on the birth of new ethos out of the old ones, in what Nietzsche would call the ‘beginning of something altogether new and strange in history...’(Nietzsche, 1974: 268).

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Notes

¹ The history of the Young Turkish movement can be traced back to the reforms inaugurated by Sultan Selim III in the late eighteenth century. The movement was an attempt to develop a broad theoretical justification for the emerging centralized modern bureaucratic state in terms of the Ottoman traditions and Islamic principles. Though essentially a reformist movement, it confined itself to the strata of an ‘intra-bureaucratic’ order that originated from the patrimonial officialdom of pre-tanzimat era, identifying ‘a new generation of bureaucrats who were replacing an older one’ (Mardin: 1971: 199). For a general history of the movement, see Lewis, [1961]1968: 74-174.

² Along with Russian, Mexican and Chinese revolutions, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 identified a significant part of a global popular revolutionary movement of the early twentieth century. As Janet Afary argues, the Constitutional Revolution was not merely a transformation in the elite structure, but rather a grass-root based political and socio-cultural revolution, which reduced the powers of the shah and his ministers (Afary, 1996), marking the ‘first popular constitutional revolution in Asia’ (Mottahedeh, [1985]2002: 6). The Islamic revolution of 1978-9 was also a popular insurrection aimed at (radically) curtailing arbitrary power, but mostly differed in the causes that led to its occurrence. As Ervand Abrahamian and Said Amir Arjomand have shown in their seminal studies, the 1979 revolution was an outcome of socio-economic changes on the political structure, especially under the rule of the Pahlavi regime (Abrahamian, 1982), and the deep-seated transformation of the Shi’i hierarchy and changes in the dominance of a dual system of ulama and royal authority until the centralization of Pahlavi state in the twentieth century (Arjomand, 1988).

³ The term ‘knightly’ does not signify the Western form of knighthood, as the military elite of the High Middle Ages that maintained a privileged social status by having control over land. Though similarities can be detected between the Western and Islamic knightships, as it will be briefly explained in the final section of this article, the idea of ‘knightly’ order here represents distinctive Islamic traits in reference to the history of the Ottoman and the Safavid chieftaincies.

⁴ In the *Venture of Islam*, Hodgson lists six periods in the course of the Islamic history: the formative (to 692C.E), the High Caliphate (to 945), the International Civilization (to 1258), the Age of Mongol Prestige (to 1503), the era of the Gunpowder Empires (to c. 1800) and Modern Times, with the emergence of nation-states.

⁵ In the article Hodgson argues how the egalitarian and cosmopolitan elements in Islam, incorporated and institutionalized in the civilization of the Irano-Semitic societies, have made a lasting impact in the

interregional developments on a hemispheric-wide basis.

⁶ Similar line of argument can be detected in the works of William H. McNeill (1963;1998) and Ira M. Lapidus (1988). From a Wallersteinian perspective, John Obert Voll argues that the period represents a dynamic era, and that as a result Islam, the period developed its own kind of ‘world-system’ in form of an ‘intercivilizational entity’ by the sixteenth century (Voll,1994: 215).

⁷ Although they served in the Muslim armies as early as 674., the systematic introduction of Turkish slaves into the Caliphate army took place under the reign of Al-Mansûr (754-75) (Pipes, 1981:152). During the First Crusade of 1095, the Byzantines employed Turkish mercenaries and army commanders of Turkish origins that led the way to recapture Anatolia with the help of Turkish Muslims (Cahen, 1969: 136).

⁸ Along these frontiers, the Seljuqs encouraged the sedentarization of frontier emirates and military guard systems against the Byzantine forces.

⁹ As W. C. Brice notes, many of the Turkish tribes that migrated to the east of Anatolia also originated from the western parts of the region, near the borderlines with the Byzantine (Brice: 1955, 63).

¹⁰ Though as Claude Cahen has argued that it is ‘obviously impossible to give any figure for the Turkish immigration into Asia Minor (Cahen, 1968: 143), evidence indicates a long-term process of conversion of the natives to Islam with the migration of Turkish Muslims to the region from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries (Ménage, 1979:52-67). See also Vryonis, Jr, 1971.

¹¹ As David Gellner explains, the difference between the soteriological and the instrumental religions is primarily based on their experiential orientation towards the supernatural: whereas the former represents the belief in salvation with practices directed towards appeasing the supernatural towards the ideal of redemption, the later is directed towards making specific things happen in the world through magical practices of shamanism and spirit-possession. In this sense, instrumental religions are not based on the theme of belief, but rather efficacy of spiritual experience to control the supernatural. See Gellner, 1992.

¹² For the best exposition of the Sufi history in this period, see Arjomand, 1984:66-84. It is important to note, however, that Suffism and Islamic messianism (especially in its Shi'i form of Mahdism) existed in the earlier periods of Islamic history. The histories of the Abbasid and the Isma'ili (Fatimid) revolutions in the eighth and tenth centuries, for instance, are replete with apocalyptic and messianic beliefs in the Mahdi that ‘spread widely beyond other extremist Shi'ite groups’ (Arjomand, 2002: 114).

¹³ It is important to note that the use of the title Ghâzî existed in the armies of the Anatolian Seljuqs and the Samanids in the regions of Khurâsân and Transoxania (Corbin, 1932-3: 376). But it was used in a much narrower sense for a group of soldiers in an army.

¹⁴ C.G. Arnakis argues that Futuwwa associations first appeared in the ninth century in form of ‘volunteer warriors guilds’ (Arnakis, 1953: 234).

¹⁵ It is important to note that, as William L. Langer and Robert P. Blake explain, the name ‘Akhis’ is not derived from the Arabic word for brethren, but is ‘purely’ a Turkish word, meaning ‘knightly or noble’ (Langer & Blake, 1932: 500).

¹⁶ Space precludes me to expand upon this point. In another paper, I shall deal with this in detail.

¹⁷ See also Wittek, 1982: 285-319.

¹⁸ For a similar reductive approach, see M.F. Köprülü (1992), a leading Turkish historian of his generation in the 1930s, which argued that the early Ottomans were essentially made up of an exclusivist Turkish race.

¹⁹ On human sacrifice, see Vryonis 1971. For an anthropological critical study of the heretical practices of the early Ottomans, see Stewart, 1991: 5-12.

²⁰ Here I maintain distance from the functionalist notion of segmentary lineage theory, especially the way it is used by Ernest Gellner, defined exclusively in terms of lineal descent, with tribal members at each segment of the association equally balanced by others. As it has been noted by a number of anthropologists, segmentary lineage theory ignores divergent cultural aspects that involve complex ambiguous relations between the actual groups of a tribe. For an interesting critique of this theory, see Hammoudi, 1980.

²¹ The most important description of the Akhis comes from the Moroccan traveler Abu Abd Allah Ibn Battutu, having traveled to Anatolia in 1333. See Langer and Blake (1932) Langer and Blake refer to an article by Kramer published in 1927, suggesting how Osman may have been an Akhi leader. See Blake & Langer (1932).

²² For a study of the Turkish kinship system based on lineage of descent see Jean Cuisenier, 1975: 67.

²³ As Wittek notes, the Ghazis separated themselves from their subjects by a special white cap, which was introduced in the thirteenth century (Wittek, 1966: 39-40). The Ottomans retained this practice until the early nineteenth century Tanzimat period. Compare this distinctive white cap with the Qizilbash special head-dress, the red cap, mentioned in the following section.

²⁴ For a general history of the Safavids, see Savory, 1980 and Mazzaoui, 1972.

²⁵ Extreme Shi'is maybe defined as those who, though nominally Muslim, ascribed to heretical believes such as anthropomorphism, transmigration of souls and divine incarnation in man, which Ali, the cousin of the prophet is believed to have embodied. The heretical movement has existed since the beginning of Islam, however it was under the Ilkhanid and, in particular, the fifteenth century, when they began to flourish in unprecedented ways. For a detail description of their history, see Moosa, 1988. For a summery of diverse heretical movements in pre-Safavid Iran, see Arjomand 1981.

²⁶ I base my argument here on Annemarie Schimmel's assertion that this apparent fusion between Sufism and Shi'ism (both in its orthodox and heretical form) occurred in the centuries prior to the rise of the Safavid to power, which facilitated the advent of the dynasty as a result of this hybrid process. See Schimmel, 1974.

²⁷ Extremist Shi'is movements, for instance, increased in number under the Timurid rule in the fifteenth century. Diverse heretical popular movements made their way through out the Islamdom, particularly from south western to north eastern Iran, and especially in the east of Anatolia. See Petrushevsky, 1985: 302-26.

²⁸ It should be noted that the Ottoman history, from chieftaincy to the 'classical' imperial period, also maintained features of millenarian religiosity. But such millenarian elements were limited to the legitimization of power and the monopolization of authority, especially in the sixteenth century when the Safavid movement represented the greatest threat to the Ottoman control of Anatolia. Unlike the Safavids, millenarianism never played a central symbolic role in the formation of the Ottoman empire. For a study of Mahdism and messianic dimensions in the Ottoman state see, Fleischer, 1992: 157-178.

²⁹ James Reid's argument that the Qizilbash were not only pastorals but also a complex combination of diverse forms of economies has been criticized by number of scholars. R. D. McChesney finds Reid's

account partial and, at worst, mistaken in its use of sources. For more of Reid's interpretation of the Safavids and his understanding of the oymâq organization, see Reid, 1979: 275-281. For a critique of Ried's 1978 article, see McChesney, 1981: 87-105.

³⁰ It should be noted that the Qizilbashas too regarded themselves as Ghazis (Kafadar, 1995: 93). See also Mazzaoui, 1971 and Minorsky, 1942.

³¹ The historiographical facts behind the migration of the Shi'i ulama to Safavid Persia are points of contention among scholars. Andrew Newman, for instance, argues that this migration is a myth, since there is little evidence to support the claim that any Arab ulamas migrated in large numbers to Persia and supported the Safavid regime. See Newman, 1993.

³² Here I mainly refer to the state-sponsored performances of the Ottoman imperial circumcision ceremonies and the Safavid death rituals of Muharram in commemoration of the martyrdom of Hussain, the grandson of the prophet.

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