



TURKEY BEYOND NATIONALISM

Towards Post-Nationalist Identities

Edited by Hans-Lukas Kieser

LIBTAURIS



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Introduction

Hans-Lukas Kieser

The title of this book implies that Turkey has been deeply marked by nationalism in the 20th century. In this book we seek to understand Turkey's recent developments and future perspectives by analysing thoroughly what has been and still partly is the impact of nationalist thinking on the country. Nationalism was the mindset of the founders of the Republic in 1923; and even if it evolved in many ways during the 20th century, important principles and assumptions remained valid, or their validity was not openly questioned. Hence we need clear insights, as complete as possible, into what has been the nationalist fabric of modern Turkey.

Underlying the title is the question about the evolution of today's Turkey towards post-nationalism: in other words towards a political spirit that permits the development of a liberal, truly pluralist society where – something which has not been the case for many decades since 1923 – different cultural identities can freely express themselves, and where the state does not feel threatened by such a pluralism.

The Turkish 20th century

Let us take “revolution” as a key term for a short journey through the Turkish 20th century. Since the late 19th century, revolution had been demanded in order to create a “new Turkey”, but the word meant very different things to different protagonists. Whereas for the Young Turks who opposed Sultan Abdulhamid, revolution meant the takeover of political power in the first place, after 1911 a broad movement of Turkish ethno-nationalism (or Turkism) among educated Turkish-speaking Muslims arose. They began to understand revolution as systematic social change in nationalist terms. They developed and propagated their new and modern ethno-nationalist thinking in an organization called the Turkish Hearth, an important journal called Turkish Homeland, and through other networks.

Ten years later those Turkists were among the founders of the Republic. They considered nationalism, understood as a secular, partly *völkisch* credo, a modern remedy for the problems of the moribund Ottoman Empire. Unlike the would-be revolutionaries before them, they were ready to anticipate the fall of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire on one condition, the awakening or resurrection, as they put it, of the pure, innocent and healthy Turkish nation.

Hence revolutionarism and nationalism have been closely linked in Turkish history since the beginning of the 20th century. On the eve of the First World War, Turkish nationalism, together with a strong faith in contemporary science, took the place of religion and the cosmopolitan Islamic creed among educated youth. The radical nature of Turkish nationalism lies in the fact that as well as being a force for future national cohesion, it had to replace a universalist Ottoman worldview and the Islamic culture which lay behind it.

The Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress (the CUP), which was at the head of the Empire before and during the First World War, sponsored the Turkist movement, but, still eager to maintain or even to expand the Empire, followed a complex set of Turkist, Islamist and Ottomanist policies. The CUP partly adopted the Turkists' political vision of a nation state in Asia Minor as the Turkist congress in Geneva had outlined it in March 1913.¹ Just before and during the First World War a policy of forcible population displacement made multi-religious Asia Minor a mostly Muslim and Turkish region, a development that was accomplished after the First World War during the so-called National War of Salvation. This time the national movement under Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the later Atatürk, clearly limited its territorial aspiration from the beginning. That corresponded with its military possibilities after the Ottoman defeat in the First World War, and was in perfect accordance with the Turkist vision in Geneva six years earlier.

To sum up, we see three stages of national revolution in the first three decades of the 20th century. First, there was a takeover by young patriotic Muslim Ottomans, officials and officers, as was the case during the so-called Young Turk Revolution in 1908. Second, after 1911, a vision emerged of a total social transformation in ethno-nationalist terms, linked to the vision of Anatolia as the homeland of the Turks. Paradoxical as it may seem, this vision coexisted with the irredentist pan-Turkist dream of a union with the Turkic people in the Caucasus and Central Asia – a dream, we know, that motivated Enver's fatal military campaign against Russia in 1914/15. The third stage was the battle for, and construction of, the Turkish nation-state in the interwar period, called by the Kemalists the "Turkish Revolution" and presented and taught under this title throughout the 20th century. The history of this revolution, the War of Salvation included, has in its Kemalist version formed the sacred core of Turkish nationalist articulation since the 1920s.

The Kemalist revolution exhibits strong personal and ideological continuity with the previous revolutionary movements and their protagonists. Its deep impact on Turkey and the ongoing severe problems with the historiography of the nation-state's founding period (specifically from 1913 to 1938), have to do with this linkage. This also explains why the makers of the Republic identified with the anti-Christian CUP policies in Anatolia of the 1910s, though they claimed to have founded a totally new state in 1923. The Turkish revolution of the interwar period, however, built upon the demographical facts that had been

created in the decade before and were set out and recognized in diplomatic terms in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Mustafa Kemal himself declared the same year to Muslims in Adana: “Armenians have no rights at all in this prosperous country. The country is yours, the country belongs to the Turks. In history this country was Turkish, therefore it is Turkish and will remain Turkish for ever. The country has finally been returned to its rightful owners. The Armenians and the others have no rights at all here. These fertile regions are the country of the real Turks.”²

After 1923, the Kemalist single-party regime imposed far-reaching reforms. Its declared goal was to make the new Turkey a respected nation state on the same level of civilization as those in Europe. The way the founding fathers attempted to do this in reality fitted into the context of the time: forcible social technology, Social Darwinism, undemocratic elitist decision making, *völkisch* nationalism, an anti-liberal stance, and a cult of leaders. Like other European countries Turkey must fathom and recognize these important shadows in its own history, if it really wants to take leave of the spirit of those times.

The contrast between the cures of the interwar period and today’s prescriptions for the road to Europe is sharp: here we see the pragmatic implementation of a culture of law in a pluralist framework, closely controlled by international EU commissions; there national sovereignty was affirming itself proudly against an agonizing imperialist post-First World War Europe, and particularly against all those in Asia Minor who were not able or did not want to convert to the enthusiastic, exclusivist belief in Turkishness.

Nevertheless a direct link exists between then and now: the wish to be secular and the wish to be European. There is no clearer sign of this than the centrepiece of the Turkish revolution, the Swiss Civil Code, considered in Europe at the time as the most progressive law, and introduced in 1926 in the young Turkish Republic. But the act and actor of this introduction again were ambivalent; Dr Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, the minister of justice, believed coercion and violence to be an appropriate means of implementing legal progress. The biographical record of this important politician and theorist of Kemalism shows strong anti-Christian and later on anti-Kurdish resentment. Almost naturally, in the 1930s he sympathized with Adolf Hitler.

Apart from the case of Bozkurt, the construction of the new state was highly ambivalent. Article 88 of the 1924 Constitution defined all citizens as Turks, irrespective of their ethno-religious affiliation. Administrative practice and social reality, however, fell far short of this civic understanding, largely favouring an ethno-religious Turco-Sunni and in the 1930s a strongly *völkisch* understanding of Turkish identity. The Law on Settlement of 1934, for example, which is still in force, limits the right of immigration and naturalization to people “of Turkish descent and culture”.³

Even though Hitler called himself, like Mussolini, Atatürk’s student,⁴ Kemalism differs from fascism and Nazism. This is evident in the prudent

management of foreign affairs by Atatürk and his successor İsmet İnönü. It was symbolic that Atatürk appeared in public as a well-dressed British gentleman, instead of a uniformed chief,⁵ and similarly there are differences in the form and direction of the respective revolutionary projects. Nevertheless strongly anti-democratic, anti-liberal features were common to all of them. Despite the transition to a multi-party system, no fundamental break took place after 1945, and no attempt to come to terms with the weighty historical heritage of the nation-state's founding period (1913-38) succeeded.

Contrary to western Europe after the Second World War which, with transatlantic help, bade farewell to the previous period of war, revolution and genocide while beginning its common construction, Turkey never got the opportunity to distance itself expressly and officially from its own national myths – perhaps understandably. One needs a reliable, constructive perspective for the future, if one wants to overcome traumas, inflicted or suffered, in one's own history. A purely anti-Kemalist Islamist, Kurdish nationalist or generally anti-Turkish about-turn in the writing of history did not and does not do the job.

Together with most authors of this volume, I believe that there is now a better opportunity to come to terms with Turkish national history than ever before. It is time to say a last good-bye to the Turkish nationalism which is rooted in the inter-war period – although this does not hold good for a couple of its declared, but unattained, goals: equality, democracy, and a modern secular state under the rule of law. The last good-bye concerns the underlying national identity, *Türklük* or “Turkishness”, based (among the Young Turks) on Muslim Turkish identity and (for Atatürk and many Kemalists) on an anthropological, ethno-racial identity. If the ethnically and religiously neutral *Türkiyelilik* (“being from Turkey”) is not given pride of place as a cornerstone of Republican identity, as a commission has recently proposed, modern Turkey's problematic ambivalence can hardly be overcome. The Report on Human Rights of the government's Commission for Minorities and Cultural Rights⁶ was presented in autumn 2004; it raised hot debates and met much opposition in Turkey, thus showing that the road towards a post-ethno-national identity is still a long one. Even though with sometimes wildly varying interpretations, the experience of history and the political imprint of the founding fathers remained an untouchable cornerstone throughout the 20th century in Turkey. Everyone claimed the “biblical corpus” of Turkish nationalism: all the parliamentary parties after the establishment of the multi-party system in 1946 as well as the young revolutionist Deniz Gezmis (the figurehead of the young leftists after 1968), the authorities who hanged him in 1972, and the speakers of minorities as different as the Alevis and the Jews. Rhetorically at least, they all subscribed to the War of Salvation; to the ideals of the Turkish revolution; to Atatürk as the immortal leader and world history's great revolutionary; and many of them even to Atatürk's highly Turco-centric history of civilizations, the so-called Turkish History thesis.

The corpus of nationalist references lacked thorough critics of its historical value, and it could be used or misused in all kinds of ways. No wonder that despite important attempts at indoctrination, it did not help establish national coherence and stability, as became evident in the second half of the 20th century. The party leaders often used an unprincipled populist nationalism to serve their electoral campaigns and day-to-day politics. Many of them had recourse to Islam or Islamism for the same purpose. Despite its evident contradiction with the Kemalist legacy, a Turkish-Islamic synthesis was established that determined the public space in the last third of the century. This resulted in obligatory Sunni Muslim education at school after the military coup of September 1980.

All these adaptations could not manage to make Turkish nationalism a sufficiently integrative force. Its historical record in the founding period was too anti-liberal, too exclusive. When, after the middle of the 20th century, rural youth began to attend school, they realized their previous exclusion and became politicized. The idolization of Turkishness and its leaders provoked the non-Turkish citizens, particularly the Kurds; privileges for the Sunnis entailed discrimination against other confessions, particularly the Alevis. The social cleavage between those who suffered under the country's permanent crisis and those who turned the same crisis into a profitable affair contradicted republican values fundamentally. The army, though called the guardian of the Kemalist revolution and highly respected for that, appeared increasingly to many as an anti-democratic caste that was particularly privileged because of its geostrategical importance within NATO.

In the 1970s, Turkey was on the brink of a general civil war. At high human and social costs, the military coup of 12 September 1980 recreated some stability. But still the army and the political class did not call into question the ethno-national philosophy of their state. The simple word "Kurd" remained a taboo in the media and the public sphere, until the anti-Kurdish massacres in Northern Iraq and the subsequent mass flight into Turkey made it internationally impossible to continue this course after 1988. But the timid liberalization in the media was not enough to stop the ongoing war between the state and a Kurdish guerilla force whose leaders were sometimes denigrated as Armenians. Turkish nationalism, including its phobias from after the First World War, was greatly reinvigorated in the context of the clash with the Kurds and the end of the Cold War. Even non-militant Kurdish intellectuals were accused of planning to divide up Turkey, working hand-in-glove with the enemy camp in Europe.

Once more the resurgence of the old ghosts of Turkey's founding period could be observed. Turkey reacted with coercion and violence. In the war with unscrupulous guerilla fighters, the security forces systematically depopulated thousands of villages and collaborated with Mafia-like networks and Islamist killers. In reality Turkey was quite helpless. Its inhabitants, above all in the east,

suffered very much. The political class failed to offer any perspective which would lead to the abandonment of ethno-nationalist vision of society and centralist visions of the state which were no longer viable.

It is true that Turkey was seeking to be a candidate to the Union for four decades. Hence the EU, which was concerned by massive immigration from Turkey, was asked to share responsibility for the affairs of a country that was knocking at its doors. But the EU was not ready to do this. The USA for its part was content with the functioning of the strategic partnership. It only began to worry about Turkey seriously when, in 2003, it refused to participate in the military campaign against Iraq.

Against the background of the 1990s, we can speak today of signs of a silent liberal revolution or post-national transformation in Turkey. Why has this come about after the nationalist outbursts and the dismal record on human rights in the 1980s and 1990s? Several factors have contributed to a fundamental change: among them the disillusionment of a growing civil society over the political system that since the proclamation of the nation state has never achieved three important goals: economic welfare, political liberties, and human rights.

At the end of 1999, the EU's decision to accept Turkey as a candidate to join the Union was a high level affirmation of the new perspective long longed-for in a fragmented Anatolian society. This opened the way for pragmatic and innovative solutions to many chronic problems related to Turkish nationalism in the 20th century. With Ebru Bulut (in her chapter on popular nationalism in this volume), one can consider the deep economic crisis of 2001 as the point when Turkish nationalism, seen as the "syntax" of the political system, burnt out. As they had already done during the catastrophic earthquake in 1999, the nation and its representatives appeared weak and dependant on the West. All this led to the fundamental reconfiguration of the political field in the elections of 2002, from which the Justice and Development Party (AKP), led by Recep Tayip Erdogan, emerged as the great victor. All the other traditional parties that had dominated the field since the 1950s were losers, i.e. no longer represented in parliament, except for the Republican Popular Party (CHP).

Turkey today is living through a period of transition which is important not only for the country but also for Europe and the Middle East. Concomitant with the process of emancipation from a dominant nationalism, there are not only political and economical but also enormous historiographical challenges. These should be taken seriously – and not merely among historians – if Turkey's silent revolution is to be successful in the long term.

There is a further challenge. We in Europe and elsewhere are required, not just as scholars, to think through modern history in a markedly interactive, trans-national perspective. For Europe, such a perspective should include the neighbouring country Turkey, with its Ottoman background, much more than our university ivory towers and textbooks have done in the past.⁷

This book

This book investigates the new perspectives of present-day Turkey. Its title suggests an emancipation from ethno-nationalism for the sake of liberal and human rights. Emancipation in this sense requires much political and legal action but also gruelling intellectual and historiographical work. The authors of this book seek to contribute to this work by making Turkish nationalism the subject of sophisticated scholarly consideration and respectful criticism, but decidedly not of fascination. Fascination has been present too long, first in the admiring perception of Turkish nationalism in interwar Germany (due to shared nationalist and revisionist sympathies), and later – partly geo-strategically motivated – in British and American Turkish studies that praised the “modern rise” of an anti-Russian, pro-Western modern Turkish nation state, a NATO member since 1952.

The book has five parts that chronologically and thematically cover about a hundred years from the founding period of Turkish nationalism, at the beginning of the 20th century, to today’s post-nationalist challenges in relation to the EU reforms, historiography and collective self-understanding.

Part I deals with the founding period and its enduring ideological weight. Mehmed S. Hanioglu articulates the groundbreaking thesis that, several years before the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the Turkist Movement of the 1910s, Turkism was already the driving force of the members of the Central Committee of the Young Turks’ revolutionary Committee of Union and Progress. His text is an excellent historical introduction in the origins of Turkish nationalism.

In my biographical approach of Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, I (Hans-Lukas Kieser) focus on Turkist continuities from late Ottoman to early Republican times. I insist upon the ideological force Turkism possessed for the generation born during the Ottoman *fin de siècle*, and its force of “salvation” providing emancipation from the Islamic Imperial thought that had entered a state of deep crisis in the 19th century. My study points out the profound ambivalence of the modernist project related to Turkism, including Kemalism, since it oscillated between an Occidentalism regarded as universal, and a pseudo-scientific *völkisch* enthusiasm that excluded the ethno-religious Other, if he or she did not or could not convert to the “Turkish ideal”.

Hamit Bozarslan in his chapter distinguishes three stages of Kemalism: first the Kemalist movement during the War of Independence as a kind of offspring of the Committee of Union and Progress that “cleansed” “its” Anatolian territory from its Christian “enemies”; second the revolutionary process of the 1920s (after 1923), focused on the personality of Mustafa Kemal, but without a codified ideology; and third, in the 1930s, Kemalism as an elaborated ideology of nationalist revolution, giving the state the right to exert absolute control over society. Kemalism represented “a thoroughly successful experience of integration into Europe, but into a profoundly anti-democratic and anti-liberal

Europe”, Bozarslan writes. He concludes by asking whether “Turkey will be able to bid farewell to yesterday’s Europe, as the condition of her integration into Europe, or if she will preserve the Kemalist legacy as the essence of her own conception of Europe.”

Part II focusses on what happened to the ethno-religious Other under Turkish nationalism. The Armenian Genocide or the coercive Greek-Turkish population exchange are well-known events in the West, but were only the tip of an iceberg that consisted of massive ethno-religious violence, coercion and discrimination during and beyond the Republic’s founding period. Based on recently released Ottoman state documents, Fuat Dündar summarizes the CUP’s extensive settlement policies during the First World War that also concerned non-Turkish Muslim groups, among them the Kurds.

With special regard to the Jews, Rifat Bali surveys the politics of Turkification during the single party period (1923-50). Turkification affected the non-Turkish Muslims in the first place, whereas the Republic remained ambivalent where non-Muslims – those who remained after the massacres and expulsion before 1923 – were concerned, because it never accepted them as fully equal citizens. Thus despite the pressure and various measures of Turkification, Turkifying the non-Muslims in the sense of integrating them into an egalitarian and secular Turkish nation failed.

This was partly true also for the *dönme*, Jews, mostly from Saloniki, who converted to Sunni Islam in the 17th century. Even if the *dönme* were far better placed than Christians or Jews to assimilate into Turkish society and have access to important posts, *dönme* identity was “difficult to resolve so long as the question of race surfaced and conceptions of race fed into understandings of the nation”, as Marc Baer writes in his chapter. Thus the totally discriminatory implementation of the Capital Tax levy promulgated in 1942 touched Christian, Jewish and *dönme* citizens. Between 1938 and 1945, Turkey deprived several thousand of its Jewish nationals living abroad of their citizenship, thus leaving them at risk of persecution and annihilation, as Corinna Görgü shows. Her study investigates the early Republican policies of naturalization and denaturalization aimed to create an ethnically homogeneous population. This too is the context of Berna Pekesen’s chapter on the Armenian exodus from Alexandretta in the 1930s.

Despite the profound ambivalence of Turkish nationalism towards non-Sunnis or non-Turks, nationalism was and remains, until very recently, the only legitimizing framework within which to make claims in Turkey, particularly for members of non-Sunni groups. They have often proclaimed themselves to be intensely Kemalist citizens as a talisman against the unitary dogma of the Republic, fearing otherwise to be seen as illegitimate Others with particularist claims. This is particularly true until today for the important group of Alevis (non-Sunni Muslims), as Elise Massicard shows in her paper. There is some hope that Turkey’s road towards the EU will lead to the recognition of the

Republic's interior diversity surmounting the constant fear of Turkey falling apart.

Part III addresses the post-nationalist historiographical challenge facing today's Turkey: how to come to terms with a complex past while leaving behind ready-made nationalist explanations? These were – partly comprehensible – “products” that made advances possible despite all the shadows. But they served largely to reshape or suppress the memory of traumas inflicted in the nation-state's founding period. Moreover, as Fatma Müge Göcek makes clear in her chapter, the Turkish historical narrative failed to problematize the ideology of nationalism because it becomes totally integrated into it. The same nationalist narrative caused the actions of groups now seen as Others to disappear or be depreciated, including retrospectively their actions in Ottoman times. Göcek proposes an alternative post-nationalist historiographic periodization of Ottoman and Turkish history. According to this periodization, the nationalist period starts with the 1902 Congress of the Ottoman opposition parties in Paris, and not, as does the Turkish master-narrative inaugurated by Mustafa Kemal, with the War of Independence in 1919. 1902 leads us back to a multicultural Ottoman order, but also to the years when the CUP's Central Committee took a strongly Turkist turn. A post-nationalist Turkish historiography thus has to analyse the two decades before 1923, taking a critical stance towards deeply-rooted nationalist prejudices, instead of obfuscating these “most virulent formative stages of Turkish nationalism”. For Göcek, a new era toward a post-nationalist period in terms of Muslim-minority relations starts in 1982 with the beginning neo-liberalization under president Turgut Özal.

One very particular formative stage was the slaughter of the Anatolian Armenians during the First World War, a *pièce de résistance* and insuperable obstacle for a narrow nationalist historiography, because, for apologetical reasons, it suppresses the perspective of the victims. Insofar as historiography is an activity dealing with truth(s), it has to take on responsibility. Beyond legal issues, Raymond Kévorkian addresses the question of how to deal with the historical responsibility for the Armenian Genocide. Analysing some court-martials in Istanbul in 1919-20, he points out the problem of the representatives of a society used to understand itself as Sunni Muslims, as the *millet-i hakime* or dominant Ottoman class, and therefore not responsible to anyone but themselves. Instead of stubborn apologetics for key instigators of mass violence like Talat or Ismail Enver, Kévorkian asks the actors of a future Turkish national historiography to bring out the role of Turkish people with civic courage who acted against the anti-Armenian measures of the régime, like Vehib Pasha, Hasan Mazhar and other soldiers or civil servants.

Part IV deals with “Turkey in motion”, with the “transformations and post-national challenges” of today's Turkey, particularly with the politics and symbols of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), in power since 2002. Ebru Bulut shows in her chapter how the “traditional” political system was able to

reproduce itself again (for the last time?) in the 1990s, and how it was supported by a revival of popular nationalism against the background of the war in the Kurdish provinces. Nationalist cohesion collapsed after 1999, with the economic crisis of 2001 playing an important role and thus opening the way for the reconfiguration of the political landscape in 2002. Günter Seufert reviews the AKP's religious politics: Does the AKP government still use religion as a means of nation building, as the "secularist" Republic of Turkey always did through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (founded in 1924, when the Caliphate was abolished)? Or are there signs of religion becoming a free factor of civil society in Turkey? The fundamental problem is, as Seufert states with reference to the theologian Mehmed S. Aydın, that in Turkey "the omnipresence of debates about religion goes hand in hand with the absence of religion as a moral language of society", and hence the religions' silence on vital issues (in marked contrast to the Churches' behaviour in the West). The AKP government itself is not (yet) ready for fundamental reforms of its Kemalist – and partly Ottoman – heritage of politically controlled religion. It seems to be still far from conceiving a fundamental reform, if not abolition, of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (a state institution financed by the taxes of all Turkish citizens, but responsible, until now, exclusively for promoting a Sunni version of Islam close to the state). Seufert nevertheless believes that a new, more liberal way of approaching religion, postulated by personalities like Hüseyin Hatemi from Istanbul University's Law Faculty, or particularly in the form of a "new Islamic theology", by Mehmed S. Aydın (now Minister of State in charge of the Directorate of Religious Affairs), "is (...) preparing state and society for reforms that may become inevitable in the years to come." In her chapter on "post-nationalist semiotics", Béatrice Hendrich interprets the AKP's emblem, a shining bulb underneath the acronym "Ak Parti" ("ak" meaning white, clean). For her, the emblem is "deliberately polysemic and strives to integrate in one message Islamic tradition, societal reform, technical and cultural progress and the orientation towards a democratic Europe, instead of making Turkish nation-building its only goal."

The Kurdish conflict is the real acid test for Turkey's reformist road towards an open society, as Gülistan Gürbey points out in her chapter. Like all the authors of this volume, Gürbey judges Turkey's EU perspective positively, appreciating the steps already taken towards reform. These steps, which can hardly be reversed, are resulting in a perceptible improvement of the atmosphere even for Kurds in Turkey; most important is the lifting of the state of emergency in the south-east, so frequently imposed during the 20th century. But as with the reforms concerning the non-Muslim minorities, the legal framework gives the authorities much leeway for restrictive application in the field of cultural rights. Gürbey pleads for the EU to make clear what precisely it understands as minimum standards according to the Copenhagen criteria and how Turkey can work for a better implementation of the central criterion of

accession, “respect and protection of minorities”. The problem of the internally displaced persons, mostly Kurds from the eastern provinces, is still unresolved; the solid, civic, pluralist integration of that part of Asia Minor, which has a particularly bloody historical record since the Armenian massacres, still has to be carried out. The peaceful solution of the Kurdish conflict is a core challenge for Turkey, indeed an acid test for its emancipation from a burdensome ethno-nationalist heritage.

The subject of Part V again is “Turkey in movement”, particularly with regard to its EU perspective. Eugen Krieger traces the story of Turkey's first steps toward the then European Economic Community (EEC) around 1960. Joseph Luns, president of the EEC, optimistically declared in 1963 that the Treaty of Association with Ankara testified “to the profound changes taking place on our continent”. Krieger points out that major motivations for the Treaty of Association with Ankara in 1963 were security concerns in the context of the Cold War and the pressure of the USA. The enormous financial aid repeatedly given in this connection by the West did not promote a development of democracy, but sustained the political and military élites' precarious management of the country, marked by social unrest, economic crisis, mass migration and military putsches.

A factor important for the process leading to the reconfiguration of the political landscape in 2002 was the EU's decision in 1999 to accept Turkey as a candidate for membership of the Union. Gabriel Goltz examines the intensive reform process that Turkey has undergone since 2002 with regard to the non-Muslim minorities. He argues that a general lessening of the state's tight control over the social sphere, as a result of the EU process, has probably proved to have more positive effects for the non-Muslim communities, contributing to an egalitarian plural society in Turkey, than the tool of minority rights set out in the Lausanne Treaty of 1923, but largely ignored in the legal reality of the Republic for the last eighty years and moreover limited to certain recognized Christian and Jewish groups. Analyzing the interconnection between national identity, asylum and immigration politics, Kemal Kirişçi discerns the EU as a vehicle of post-nationalist transformation in Turkey. In recent asylum and immigration policies there are, Kirişçi argues, clear elements of “post-nationalization” compared with the previous ones rooted in the Kemalist interwar-period. In these two areas, “Turkish officials are now much more willing to cooperate with Turkish and foreign non-governmental organizations, western governments, the European Commission and other international organizations, such as the UNHCR in particular.” But with regard to national identity and immigration, the challenge for Turkey – like Israel – to revise its ethno-religiously-centred approach, replacing it with one that might be more inspired by civics, is far from being accomplished, Kirişçi concludes.

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PART I

TURKISH NATIONALISM:
THE IDEOLOGICAL WEIGHT
OF THE FOUNDING PERIOD (1905-1938)

Chapter 1

Turkism and the Young Turks, 1889-1908

M. Şükrü Hanioğlu

The dominant explanation of the emergence of Turkish nationalism holds that it was a relatively late development, the origins of which lie in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13. According to this thesis, war in the Balkans exposed the bankruptcy of the worn-out ideology of Ottomanism, leading to an abrupt surge in nationalist sentiment among Ottoman intellectuals of Turkish decent. Despite numerous errors in theory and fact, this thesis has proved remarkably resilient. David Kushner's path-breaking study of 1977 on the rise of Turkish nationalism between 1876 and 1908 should have been sufficient to finish off the thesis once and for all, but instead left only an insignificant dent in its armour.¹

Twenty years later a popular historian of modern Turkey and the late Ottoman Empire could still maintain that "the vocabulary of nationalism scarcely existed in the Turkish [...] language of the [late Hamidian] period" and that the term *millet* in the pre-1908 Young Turk context still referred to "religious communities."²

An important reason for the persistence of such easily refutable claims³ is their affinity to Turkish official ideology in the early years of the republic. Ideology entered scholarship in the 1920's and '30s through the pens of Turkish historians who fully accepted Republican verdicts on late Ottoman history. They reconstructed nationalist history in such a way as to ignore the Hamidian period entirely. Focusing instead on the Second Constitutional Period between 1908 and 1918, they drew a straight line back from the new ideology formulated by the founding fathers of the Turkish republic to its alleged origins under the rule of Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress (hereafter CUP).⁴

From a theoretical perspective, this approach has three major flaws. First, it treats nationalism as a spontaneous ideological and political phenomenon, thereby ignoring precursor, proto-nationalist movements and ideologies that prepare the ground for the emergence of nationalism. An examination of the official and the underground opposition press under Abdülhamid II leaves no doubt that a Turkist movement did emerge during the pre-revolutionary period – although it strove to stay within the bounds of Ottomanism by remoulding it. Second, the prevailing explanation approaches the concepts of

Ottomanism and Turkism in a distinctly essentialist manner. As a consequence, it imagines a false competition between two discrete, monolithic, and unchanging ideologies: Ottomanism on the one hand and Turkism (or Turkish nationalism) on the other. In reality, however, these concepts possessed fluid, blurred boundaries even after the Balkan Wars. Moreover, Turkism often appeared as a new interpretation of Ottomanism rather than a clear-cut break with it; usually, this meant attributing a centrifugal role to the Turkish ethnic group within the Ottoman whole. Third, due to its retrospective approach to history, the dominant thesis perceives a teleological dissolution of Ottomanism into Turkish and other Ottoman nationalisms. But what seems inevitable in retrospect was not so at the time.

In this short article, I analyse the attitude of the Young Turks (and particularly the CUP) towards Turkism, trace its transformation into a nascent nationalist movement before the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, and demonstrate the significance of Turkism in the *Weltanschauung* of the CUP. The discussion focuses on elite perceptions of identity. There are two major reasons for this. For one, the debates recorded in historical sources took place largely between the literate few: intellectuals and political elites. Secondly, although the educated elite amounted to a small fraction of the population of the empire and their published journals were read only by the literate few, they stood at the forefront of the dramatic changes that took place in late Ottoman society. They exerted an influence on the shape of events that far outweighed the relative proportion of the elite in the population. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that the overwhelming majority of the Ottoman populace, caught up in their local identities and concerns, remained largely unmoved by the grand ideals of Ottomanism, Turkism or Pan-Islamism.

The Evolution of Ottomanism as a Concept from the Tanzimat to the Young Turks

Several major factors compelled the Ottoman state to adapt its official ideology in the 19th century: the need to confront European modernity, the challenge of nationalist movements, the necessity of asserting central control over an enormous and fractious empire, and the desire to join the European Concert. The key change involved a redefinition of the concept of equality. The Islamic conception of respect for the rights of the unequal dhimmī was gradually replaced by a notion of equality derived from the French *Déclaration des Droits de l'homme et du Citoyen*. As Mahmud II is claimed to have said: “Je ne veux reconnaître désormais les musulmans qu’à la mosquée, les chrétiens qu’à l’église et les juifs qu’à la synagogue.” The Tanzimat statesmen strove to institutionalise this approach by producing universally applicable legal codes. The implications of legal equality for a social order defined by religion were revolutionary. The new emphasis on an Ottoman identity common to all

citizens of the empire crowded out, at least in theory, the hitherto dominant sectarian identities. The “de-religionization” of official ideology and redefinition of a secular homo Ottomanicus was an extraordinarily difficult undertaking. Not only did Muslim resentment swell after 1856 (and with it support for the maintenance of Islam as a pillar of the state-caliphate), nationalism emerged as a powerful competitor to both the religious and the Ottoman orientations within all Ottoman communities. As nationalist separatism increasingly threatened to tear apart the multi-national empire, the remedy of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims (however much desired by the latter) no longer appeared adequate.

The attempts of the Tanzimat to reform the religious communities from within tipped the internal balance of power in favour of new laymen at the expense of the old clerical establishments. Even in the small Jewish community, lacking in clerical hierarchy, the reform proved ultimately unsuccessful when a revival of rabbinical influence produced a bitter clash between the two elements.⁶

In the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate the results were still more damaging, as non-Greek ethnic community leaders launched a struggle for their own independent churches. The influence of laymen within the various communities also gave rise to the development of new educational curricula that tended to foster nationalism. Thus a reform designed to weaken clerical communitarianism and enhance equality between communities ended up cementing a bond between ethnicity and religion, thereby reinforcing the very centrifugal ethno-nationalist forces it was meant to suppress.

Clearly, Ottomanism founded upon the notion of equality among religious communities was no panacea for the internal strife afflicting the Ottoman realm. In order to respond to the challenge of ethnic separatism, during the second half of the Tanzimat era Ottomanism was refashioned as an ideology promoting equality among Ottoman ethnic groups. However, just as the old Ottomanism never succeeded in erasing the traditional dominance of the Muslim *millet*, so too the new Ottomanism could not escape the preponderance of influence exercised by the Turkish element.

The intrusive demand of the imperial centre for a wholesale identity shift from ethnic and religious to supranational and secular, coupled with the push for rapid centralisation of the empire, could not fail to arouse the suspicion amongst non-Turkish ethnic groups that behind the stated goal of “Ottomanism” lay a more sinister aim of Turkification – a process ultimately aiming at suppressing their identities and privileges. Such suspicions were heightened by the increasing employment of Turkish symbols by the imperial centre. İsmail Kemal Bey (İsmail Qemali), a loyal servant of the leaders of the Tanzimat (who, as he put it, “would have done honour to any country in the world”) admitted that the reforms, coupled with the harsh measures adopted against recalcitrant communities, “concealed the perpetual desire of the

Turkish chauvinists to bring about the unification of all the races of the empire.”⁷

It was no coincidence that during the last decade of the Tanzimat, the intellectuals known as the Young Ottomans, who sought to reconcile Islamic principles with European constitutionalism, in the final analysis advocated a version of Ottomanism grounded in the concept of citizenship and guaranteed by a constitution. Ottomanism, as the Young Ottomans (as well as the future architect of the Ottoman constitution, Ahmed Şefik Midhat Pasha) envisioned it, placed the individual’s identity as a citizen of the empire above all other affiliations. Such an interpretation, of course, also tended to reinforce the secular character of Ottomanism.

In fact, many non-Turkish proponents of Ottomanism demanded that government positions be open to all Ottomans. As the organ of the Bulgarian Ottomanists put it: “As long as a career in the state bureaucracy continues to be a birthright of sorts for the Muslims, as long as Christians are excluded from high government office and are barred from lower-level positions in all but rare circumstances, there is no reason whatsoever to hope that non-Muslims will want to study the [Ottoman] Turkish language to any great depth [...] We do not believe it will be possible for all citizens of the [Ottoman] empire to think of themselves as members of the same family until they all have equal access to government service.”⁸

Some Jews expressed similar sentiments in reaction to the government’s decision not to appoint a Jewish member to the new council of state, arguing that “wherever Israelites are settled they are invariably loyal and useful members of the community, especially in those countries where their rights are fully admitted as citizens.”⁹

Thus demands for rights of a secular character, such as equal opportunity employment in the bureaucracy, supplanted customary religious demands (e.g., the call for full implementation of religious equality promised in 1856).

The promulgation of the Ottoman constitution, and the subsequent convocation of a parliament, marked the high point of what might be termed “new Ottomanism”. The timing of the announcement – at the height of an international crisis and under heavy European pressure to grant privileges to the empire’s Christian communities – was, of course, no coincidence. Indeed, many Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals had come to view Ottomanism (founded upon citizenship) as a powerful tool to resist European demands for privileges for the non-Muslim communities of the empire.¹⁰ If legal distinctions between the religious communities were abolished, so the argument went, the logic behind European demands for equality would cave in. In the event, the implementation of new Ottomanism had to be postponed indefinitely, due to the prorogation of the parliament in February 1878, but at the time it was embraced by some intellectuals as a silver bullet with which to kill off separatism once and for all.

The régime of Abdülhamid II redefined Ottomanism once again, imbuing it with Islamic characteristics. Fearing that a strengthening of the common denominator of citizenship would lead to dangerous demands for representation and would ultimately accelerate separatist processes,¹¹ the régime reintroduced a determining role for Islam in imperial identity. The return to Islam was also warranted by the demographic changes imposed by successive losses of Christian-populated territories in the wars of the 19th century, and particularly in the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78. By bringing religion back centre-stage, the régime reversed the trend towards the secularization of identity set in motion by the Tanzimat statesman. Moreover, in Hamidian Ottomanism, the boundaries between religious, ethnic, and supranational identities were deliberately blurred. The sultan saw his main mission as protection of the Caliphate; to fulfil it he sought to forge Pan-Islamism into a proto-nationalist force, one with which he could hold the Muslim elements of the empire together. Undoubtedly, Hamidian Ottomanism was most attractive to non-Turkish Muslims, such as Albanians, Arabs, and Kurds for whom it provided a real alternative to nationalist orientations. Islamic Ottomanism was naturally least attractive to non-Muslim ethnic groups, whom in practice it threatened with a diminution of status, theoretical legal rights notwithstanding.

The spread of Turkism during this period did not yet exert a marked influence on official ideology. But it was nourished by frustration with official policy. One of the distinguishing marks of the Hamidian régime was the prominence of Muslim Albanians, Arabs, and Kurds in the highest positions of the bureaucracy and court. This policy fuelled the surreptitious growth of Turkist sentiments. Beneath the surface of Hamidian censorship, resentment at the preferential treatment of non-Turkish Muslims – and the denial of just dues to Turks – was simmering. This was almost imperceptible at the time; Abdülhamid II did not tolerate any open discussion of identity. His successors, however, called him to task for spoiling individual Albanians, Arabs, and Kurds, and granting favours to the Muslim components of these communities. The surge of Turkist sentiment under Abdülhamid II reinforced the deleterious impact of the sultan's own Pan-Islamic rhetoric on the bond between citizenship and identity.

Since both ideologies reached beyond the boundaries of the empire to non-citizen constituents, they could not fail to undermine the notion of Ottoman citizenship.

The Young Turks between Ottomanism and Turkism

The origins of the Young Turk movement can be traced back to the founding of the Ottoman Union Society (later renamed the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress) at the Royal Medical Academy in 1889. Oddly enough, not one of the four founders was of Turkish descent. They did, however, represent a diverse cross-section of the other major Muslim communities of the empire – Albanians, Circassians, and Kurds. Consequently, in its early days the

Committee – as evident from its name – leaned towards the régime’s new Ottomanism, which promoted union among Muslim Ottomans. Thus, it was strange but true that the sultan’s non-Turkish Muslim opponents (and his supporters within those communities) shared with him a common vision of the future of the state. As summarized by İshak Sükûtî, one of the original founders of the CUP, Albanians and Kurds, among others, must unite with the Turks against the West, for they shared a common goal: to defeat European schemes aimed at detaching their lands from the common fatherland in the interests of Balkan and Anatolian Christians.¹² Indeed, the first overt action of the CUP in 1895 took place in response to an Armenian political demonstration.¹³ Key branches of the organisation drafted memoranda advocating the exclusion of Christians from the organisation because of the danger that they might “turn the committee into a Christian committee,” “serve as an instrument of European intrigues,” “prevent the committee from implementing its policies vis-à-vis Christian [Ottoman] communities,” and “prevent the committee from taking the Muslims onto the path of progress.”¹⁴ Other branches that opposed an overtly exclusionist policy proposed to withhold secret identity numbers from Christian members, thereby denying them access to secret correspondence while preserving the illusion of inclusion.¹⁵ If the Young Turks were strongly influenced by the official ideology they were in principle opposing, their *Weltanschauung* was similarly influenced by the more surreptitious groundswell of Turkism. The increasing centrality of Turkish nationalist ideas in the Young Turk world view was, contrary to popular conception, a gradual, inconsistent process that was subject to numerous influences.

The major vehicle for the introduction of Turkish nationalist ideas was the penetration of the organisation by a growing body of members of Turkish extraction, who believed in the primacy of the Turks within the empire. The following anecdote gives some indication of their sentiments. One of the prospective leaders of a CUP coup d’état scheduled for 1896 later described his plan: “In the event that Abdülhamid had ventured to resist and ordered the Arab and Albanian divisions at the Chamberlain’s office to open fire on the national troops, [self-sacrificing] volunteers would easily have assassinated him.”¹⁶

It is significant that even at this early stage, when the CUP was still operating as a coalition of Muslim Ottomans, he reserves the term “national troops” for Turkish divisions and employs somewhat exclusionist language to refer to the Arab and Albanian soldiers. The privileged status accorded to Turks is also evident in the presentation of the official CUP organ as “a Turkish journal.”¹⁷ That the second official CUP organ was named *Osmanlı* (Ottoman) – and that the choice of title was strenuously defended at the time – demonstrates that despite a strong inclination to privilege the Turks, the CUP leadership, at least officially, still wished to portray a more inclusive agenda that remained within the boundaries of the official ideology.¹⁸ In this regard, the decision of a number of Young Turk intellectuals to name their journal *Türk* in 1902 should be