



From Empire to Republic

TURKISH NATIONALISM &
THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

Taner Akçam

About the Author

Taner Akçam was born in the province of Kars-Ardahan in the northeast of Turkey and became interested in Turkish politics at an early age. He was very active in the student movement of the generation of 1968 and, as the editor-in-chief of a political journal, was arrested in 1976 and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. He managed to escape one year later and fled to Germany.

He received his Ph.D. from Hanover University with a dissertation titled, *Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide: On the Background of the Military Tribunals in Istanbul Between 1919 and 1922*. He has since lectured and published extensively on this topic, with ten books and half a dozen articles in Turkish and German.

From 1988 to 2000, he held the position of Research Scientist in Sociology at the Hamburg Institute for Social Research. His scholarly interests focused on violence and torture in Turkey, a subject on which he has published a number of books and articles. He has also written extensively on Turkish national identity.

He has twice been Visiting Scholar at the Armenian Research Center, University of Michigan–Dearborn. He was Visiting Professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor, 2000–2001 and since then has been Visiting Professor of History at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities.

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and the Armenian Genocide

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Zed Books

LONDON & NEW YORK

From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide

was first published in 2004 by

Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, UK and

Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

www.zedbooks.co.uk

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Cover design by Andrew Corbett

Designed and set in 10/12 pt Times New Roman

by Long House, Cumbria, UK

Printed and bound in Malta by Gutenberg Press

Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of
St Martin's Press, LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

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A catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

US Cataloging-in-Publication Data
is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN Hb 1 84277 526 X

Pb 1 84277 527 8

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To Jan Philipp Reemstma

Preface

I remember when, during the early 1980s, I was offered the opportunity to meet with the ASALA,¹ I became extremely angry. I recall even yelling at the hapless individual who had made the proposal: ‘Don’t you ever bring up this subject again, nor do I want to hear the name of that organization from your lips. It’s an issue that’s being put out there by some dark forces and I have nothing to say to this organization, which is an extension of these dark forces.’ (The term ‘dark forces’ was commonly used to refer to foreign secret services and foreign powers.)

It was actually the typical reflexive response of a Turkish intellectual’s struggle to deal with the issue, which was regarded as very complicated and troublesome. One preferred to keep oneself aloof from the issue, especially in light of ‘the cooperation of Armenians with the imperialist powers.’ I can see clearly today that the real problem lay neither with the type of organization ASALA was nor with the question of whether Armenians had ‘made common cause with imperialist powers.’ The real problem was that the subject referred to as the ‘Armenian Problem’ occupied such a perverse place in our mind. The subject was so foreign to our way of thinking and the way we viewed the world (our *Weltanschauung*) that to approach it seriously meant risking all of the concepts or models we had used to explain our world and ourselves. Our entrenched belief systems constituted an obstacle to understanding the subject. I refer to this as a ‘fear of confronting’ the issue.

It is fair to say that political parties and even individuals with diametrically opposed ideas nevertheless maintain a common mindset. They perceive the world and themselves with the same worldview. We can exemplify this mindset, which has such a fear of examining the Armenian Genocide, thus: ‘The Ottoman Empire was the target of divisive maneuvers by the Western imperialists. Turks established their independent state by defending the last bit of territory they held in their power. The Armenians

and Greeks were local collaborators with the imperialist forces in support of their expansionary aims and wanted to partition Anatolia.⁷

The common symbolic use of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk by disparate schools of thought and politics is an interesting example of the widespread sharing of this mindset in Turkey. Writing to his father in 1971, Deniz Gezmiş, one of the leaders of the radical youth movement of 1968,² stated in a letter: 'I'm grateful to you because you raised me with Kemalist principles...I've been hearing stories about the war for [Turkish] Independence since I was little...We're Turkey's second-generation independence warriors.' The generals who had Gezmiş executed for insurgency did so on the grounds that he had acted 'against the principles of Atatürk.' It is clearly not possible to find a place for the Armenian Genocide of 1915 within this atmosphere and frame of mind. Turks and Armenians have developed a historical account of events that is completely at odds with each other's.

The problem is not limited to the history of Turkish–Armenian relations. This trend is epidemic in almost all historiography of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries in the Balkans and the Middle East. This period, which has been defined as the transition from empire to nation-states, constituted a major transformation, with the breakup of the peoples who occupied these regions. I am referring not just to the breaking apart of peoples from one another, but also to a breaking away from one's own history. The histories of all the different cultures and religions occupying this large territory have been constructed more or less through this same nationalistic perspective. Nation-states developed different and separate histories in order each to create a common past, because territory is not enough to make a population homogeneous. In addition to the ethnic–cultural–religious, that is, objective, criteria for establishing nationhood, a nation needs a common memory. Collective memory and history are the building blocks of the 'imagined' nation and the ensuing real nation-state. History has to be written in a unique way to fit this aggregate of people, who will soon remember themselves as being one, both in happiness and distress. As stated boldly by Ernest Renan, 'a nation could only be formed by the distortion of its past. It is impossible to form a nation without distorting its past.'³ 'The most common form of distortion is "forgetting."⁴

Whenever one attempts to rewrite history based on this collective memory, it is almost a requirement that one should omit or redefine other nations. This means that one's own history must be put in a context where other nations emerge as alien or the 'other.' Consequently, common histories of nationalities that had lived together for centuries were deconstructed and these same nationalities became detached from one another. The new history embodied one set of remembrances in opposition

to those of others. We can say that this itself poses a serious impediment to the solution of many contemporary problems. Furthermore, the prevalence of globalization today means that nations have less and less opportunity to live in isolation from one another.

The following question is in dire need of an answer. Instead of remembering this period as the demise of an empire and the emergence of separate nation-states, and instead of writing their respective histories as the histories of rival nation-states, is it possible to reread this period with a common historical perspective? Can we reread the history as one evolving between the Ottoman state and its citizens? It is obvious that Ottoman citizens of Armenian origin experienced this history far differently than Muslim citizens, but this should not be an obstacle for a new historical perspective. This book should be understood as a struggle for such an understanding and the product of a wish to read the transitional period from imperial state to nation-state as a history in which different nationalities comprised elements of a common history, rather than separate histories.

There is one other consideration that I would like to express with this book. Speaking openly about the Armenian Genocide in Turkish society, which means incorporating the Armenian Genocide into Turkish historical writing, has a direct impact on pushing Turkey towards becoming a truly democratic state. Unfortunately there is not yet enough awareness in Turkey of the positive and propelling effect that incorporating the narratives not only of Armenians but also of other ethnic-religious groups would have on democratization. Only nation-states that are at peace with their pasts and all their citizens can build futures based on democratic principles. Moreover, by eliminating the history of these various groups from its national narrative, Turkey has deprived itself of a rich and vibrant part of its own history.

The individual to whom I have dedicated this book, Jan Philipp Reemstma, is the Executive Director of the Hamburg Institute for Social Research. At a time when I had not yet received a doctorate, he accepted me into the institute and changed the direction of my life. He provided both emotional and material support for the research and work I did between 1988 and 2000. The more than ten books and numerous articles which I have managed to publish are the product of his encouragement and support. For these reasons he occupies a most important place in my life. I give immeasurable and heartfelt thanks to him.

In the publication of this book I had the support of several remarkable individuals. My special thanks go to the directors and staff of the Zoryan Institute. I would like to thank Greg Sarkissian, its president, who provided unstintingly the facilities and resources of the institute, and has encouraged me in my research. The deep belief that bringing the people of Armenia and

Turkey together is an indispensable element for the peace and prosperity of the region has drawn us very close together. I want to express special thanks to George Shirinian, the Director of the Zoryan Institute, whose tireless editing, challenging questions, and overseeing of the whole publication process helped make this book a reality. Vahakn Dadrian, its Director of Genocide Research, went over each page with a fine-tooth comb, making important critical analyses, despite undergoing heart surgery during the process. Müge Göçek gave me invaluable critical insight into how to put the ideas contained in this book within a general framework. I am also indebted to the many individuals who are not specifically named here, who provided important critical observations while I was preparing this book. Any shortcomings, however, are solely my responsibility.

Taner Akçam
Minneapolis
November 2003

NOTES

1. Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, an organization which was actively engaged in bombings and shootings, especially of Turkish diplomats abroad, aimed at bringing international attention to the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.
2. Gezmiş, who fought to topple the Turkish government by force, was executed for his involvement in armed struggle against the state.
3. Ernest Renan in Ulrich Schneckener, *Das Recht auf Selbstbestimmung, Ethno-nationale und internationale Politik* (Hamburg 1996), p. 26.
4. Ernest Renan quoted in Gary Smith, 'Arbeit am Vergessen.' In Gary Smith and Hinderk M. Emrich, eds, *Vom Nutzen des Vergessens* (Berlin, 1996), p. 15.

Introduction

One of the most significant features of Turkey's transition from Empire to Republic involved the development of two historical narratives that continue to shape the political attitudes of the Republic's elites. On the one hand, there is the story of the partition of the Empire among the Great Powers, which ended with its total collapse and disintegration. The process of partition created a feeling of struggling to survive against the West and caused very strong anti-Western sentiments among the Turkish ruling elite. On the other hand, there is the story of persecutions, massacres and, especially in the case of the Armenians, the annihilation of different ethnic and religious groups. This story was mostly justified by the Ottoman ruling elite as a response to the activities of its subjects which they believed contributed to a growing danger that the Empire could collapse and be partitioned. Today we can hardly find scholarly works that cover both stories as part of the same history. But without dealing with both aspects of this issue, we can never understand the history of the Ottoman Empire and especially today's problems in Turkey.

These two interrelated narratives have helped create a legacy that, whether consciously or subconsciously, is proving a formidable obstacle to the need for a national renewal through a process of democratization. Unless these two different aspects of modern Turkish history and their strong interrelationship are sufficiently understood and appreciated, one cannot grasp the ambiguities and contradictions besetting Turkish national and international politics. Turkey today still behaves according to the legacies of this double history: with great suspicion towards the West and towards the democratic reform demands of its civil society. The modalities of modern Turkish nationalism, in a sense, embody these fluctuations and variations in attitudes *vis-à-vis* the West, and Europe in particular. The fact is that these modalities cannot be entirely divorced from an acute national awareness that Europe was deeply involved in the processes that led both to

the demise and the partition of the Ottoman Empire, and also to the massacres and political annihilation of its subject peoples, which culminated in the genocidal fate of the Armenian subjects of the Empire. What follows is a brief review of the phases through which modern Turkey has been trying to cope with these problems.

Turkey is currently in the midst of a tumultuous transition affecting its social, political, economic and cultural structure. In describing the process as 'transitional,' we must define what it is that Turkey is changing from, and where it is headed. It is emerging from the legacy of its Ottoman past and is still on its way to becoming a normal, democratic nation-state by Western social and political standards. One of the most apparent reasons for this transition is the clear and compulsory demand by the European Union for political and economic structural reform. In economic terms, these reforms focus on establishing a standard free-market economy. In political terms, the reforms focus on establishing a democratic and parliamentary system in which a high premium is placed upon several types of freedom, notably freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and freedom of dissent.

The Turkish state remains under the influence and control of a civil-military bureaucratic elite, which has been institutionalized since the state's founding. One of the main conflicts within Turkey is between the duly elected body and the *de facto* body in power, namely the military-bureaucratic elite. In more general terms, the main conflict is between society and the state, which is controlled by this elite.

The Republic of Turkey was established in the early 1920s by the Ottoman military-bureaucratic elite. After the Second World War, this elite decided to share power with the democratically elected political parties, as a result of Turkey's decision to join the West. Since the 1950s, when civil society increased its demands for more liberalization, with each successive military coup—1960, 1971 and 1980—the elite has taken back more and more power under its control. The National Security Council (NSC) is the symbolic constitutional organ of this control and, since the military coup of 1980, has become entrenched as the real power within the state. The NSC is not only a consultative but also an executive body, with thousands of departments and employees. The NSC retains the right to supervise, inspect, and coordinate the activities of all ministries. Moreover, the NSC is constitutionally entitled to appoint the board members of major state institutions, including those concerned with education and the media. It is therefore no coincidence that the largest controversy in Turkey today and for the foreseeable future, regarding its relationship with the European Union, is the role of the NSC and its control of the state and civil society.

The elections in November 2002 marked an important turning point in the state–society relationship. It was the first time in Turkish history that a political party entirely outside the civil–military bureaucracy—Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, the Justice and Development Party (AKP)—had come to power. The prevailing misconception in the West is that the AKP is an Islamic fundamentalist party. This idea was initially promoted by the secular military–bureaucratic elite in Ankara to legitimize its authority. The establishment of an Islamic state, however, has never been on the AKP’s political agenda. In many respects, the AKP is actually comparable to the Republican Party in the US, or the Christian Democrats in Europe, and its progression into power aims to merge Islam with a Western political structure. Such a successful merger would mark the first time that the divergent paths of Islam and modernity (and Western-style parliamentary democracy), which split in the nineteenth century, had been reconciled.

In a sense, this agenda is a breakthrough against the cliché in the West that an Islamic society has only two options: either to adopt secular authoritarianism, mostly under military control, or to convert into Islamic fundamentalism under the control of Islamic clergy. The AKP has not only refuted Samuel Huntington’s famous thesis—which has become fashionable, especially after September 11—of a clash of civilizations, and demonstrated the compatibility between Islam and Western political norms, but it has also set the stage for Turkey’s rapid transformation toward Western democratization. The future of this transformation depends on how the power struggle between the AKP and the military–bureaucratic elite plays out. The civil–military bureaucratic elite, which holds Ankara within its grip, will not likely voluntarily divest itself of power in favor of those who are democratically elected.

On this point, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of Western political policy towards Turkey. If Turkey’s authoritarian state structure under the control of a civil–military bureaucratic elite has managed to maintain its existence through the years, it is because of external rather than internal factors. After World War Two, Turkey successfully entered into the Western European ‘camp’ and managed to maintain its authoritarian structure with little change, by virtue of the Cold War. Throughout its republican history, and particularly after the 1960s, the civil–military bureaucratic elite, with the aid of Western powers, has suppressed any steps taken towards democratization in Turkey. It is the supreme irony that the West, which holds democracy and human rights as its *raison d’être*, nevertheless has managed to become both a defender of Turkey’s authoritarian–bureaucratic system and its primary support in destroying any moves made domestically towards democracy and human rights. The more cynical reader may feel that, when one considers all the authoritarian

regimes the US has supported—for example, South Korea, Suharto in Indonesia, Pinochet in Chile, Mobutu in Zaïre, the Shah in Iran, Diem in South Vietnam, Somoza in Nicaragua—it is not a matter of irony. The military coups that have become a habit in Turkey, occurring roughly once a decade, and which have resulted in the repeated destruction of domestic democratic movements, could not have taken place without express agreement between Turkey's authoritarian-bureaucracy and the West. This alliance, which formed behind the principle of 'fighting against Communism,' continued without a hitch until the fall of the Soviet Union.

Today, Turkey faces a difficulty. With the end of the Soviet Union, one of the most important factors behind Western support for the Turkish Republic has effectively disappeared. The paradigm of Turkey being a bastion against the Soviet Union defined Turkey's place within the Western world from the beginning of the Cold War. With the new world order, Turkey must redefine its place within the region and the world.

The emergence of the Turkish state in 1923 was the product of four specific factors: the Great Powers' partition plans for Anatolia; Pan-Islamism and Turkic expansionism, independence movements of different ethnic groups within the Ottoman Empire, and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. These four factors determined not only the emergence of the Turkish Republic, but also all political boundaries in the Caucasus and the Middle East. These four factors also marked the end of the Eastern Question, which had dominated European diplomacy throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. The 'question' was how the territory of the weakening Ottoman Empire was to be distributed among the Great Powers and various local nationalities. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Eastern Question returned to the forefront of political concerns in the region, and the situation is now exacerbated by American military and political intervention. Boundaries concerns and the future of nation-states that are now struggling to retrieve lands lost as a result of the conclusion of the Eastern Question in the early 1920s, are placed back into question.

The founding of Turkey in 1923 was an answer to the Great Powers' efforts to resolve the Eastern Question. The rapid decline of the Ottoman Empire throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries had forced Ottoman-Turkish rulers to decide on a strategy for rescuing the situation. Their decision was to expand the Empire towards the Turko-Muslim nations in the East. As a result of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, however, these expansionist efforts were abandoned.

Instead, the concept of a Muslim-Turkic Empire was replaced in the minds of the Turkish rulers by the idea of nation-states based on specific geographic boundaries. Misak-ı Milli, the National Pact that specifies the boundaries that surround today's Turkey, was based not on the ethno-

cultural distinctions in the area, but purely on geographic considerations. The terminology of the National Pact was used to define and reclaim the remaining territories of the Ottoman Empire of 1918 that had not already been occupied by England or France. The proclamation of the Republic and the National Pact were fundamental breaks with the Ottoman Empire. This transformation from Empire to Republic emerged from pragmatic, *ad hoc* decision-making, without a fundamental analysis or serious understanding of previous expansionist policies. The debates in the emerging Turkish parliament during 1921–22 over the meaning of Misak-ı Milli, and the various speeches of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of Turkey, on Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism which reflect confusion over national boundaries and tension between the imperial tradition and the new nation-state, illustrate the *ad hoc* nature of this decision-making.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the idea of once again maintaining strong influence over the Turkic peoples from the Balkans to Central Asia surfaced on Turkey's agenda. Beginning in the early 1990s, a tendency has developed for Turkey to view its foreign policy from the perspective of a 19th century empire. The words of former prime minister Süleyman Demirel—'A Turkish world which will stretch from the Adriatic to Central Asia'—reflect the seriousness of these great-power fantasies. As a result, Turkish state policy has deviated from the principles of modern nation-statehood and citizenship based on universal rights, and rather has formulated its policies based on ethnic and religious kinship. The Muslim-Turkic majority in Turkey, the Turkomen in northern Iraq, the Cherkess and the Azeris in the Caucasus are the focus of these policies. The Turkish state now makes distinctions between citizens of Turkish descent and Turkish citizens of Armenian, Kurdish or other descent, categorizing the latter as ethnic aliens or external threats. This behavior clearly contradicts the founding principles of the Republic and the concept of a democratic nation-state.

The Ottoman-Turkish response to the Eastern Question was not only to pursue the goal of being a great power in the region. At the same time, this question created a strong fear of the demise of the Empire. With the decline of the Soviet Union, the fear has re-emerged that Turkey could once again become vulnerable to external influences, particularly to international decisions to partition Anatolia. Thus, Turkey views recent developments in the region as the legacy of the Eastern Question, which also partially explains Turkey's reaction to the US's policy towards Iraq in 2003.

Today, Turkey vacillates between the poles of being a great power and deep fear for its own existence. Its natural reaction has been to pull in its horns, to go into a defensive posture, and to treat every situation as a problem of vital security. The result of this posture is a desire to strengthen

the authoritarian structures of the state. I deal with these issues and the consequences for Turkey in Chapter 1.

Because of the end of the Cold War, there is an international political struggle about the new world order. The impact of these concerns should be understood within the context of a particular pattern which emerged in the Middle East during the First and Second World Wars: the shifting of state boundaries, the unilateral redrawing of borders, and the emergence of new states. If we extrapolate on this pattern, we can foresee that the result for the Middle East after the Cold War will be the same. One significant characteristic on both sides of the conflict was the continuous support from the US and USSR of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. Now, with the thawing of Cold War tensions, states in the Middle East that were once under the control of the USSR are now susceptible to US influence. It should not come as a surprise that the focus of this new period centers on Iraq and Syria, both of which were supported heavily by the USSR during the Cold War. It is foreseeable that this trend will also penetrate surrounding authoritarian states which were supported by the United States (for example, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.) In a sense, these authoritarian regimes, originally supported but now criticized by the US, reflect a conflict of America with itself.

It is obvious that Turkey can no longer exist as part of the Cold War paradigm; it no longer has a part to play as the last bastion for the West against the Soviet Union. Turkey's place on the contemporary world stage requires radical changes in its internal structures, both socially and politically, as it moves toward being a standard Western democratic state. There is strong internal resistance to these changes in Turkey, however, by the military-bureaucratic elite. The basic reason for this resistance is the burden of Turkey's past. Turkey now responds to every development with its mindset of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the strongest component of which is very strong resentment of the West. This resentment manifests itself in a barrier against the eventual establishment of democratic and human rights. This idea is discussed further in Chapter 3.

This is a point that the United States and Europe do not seem to understand. They perceive Turkey simply as a partner in NATO and consequently expect it to go along with their political plans. They totally ignore this strong anti-Western sentiment, which was expressed during Turkey's transition from Empire to Republic. According to this mindset, the American military intervention in Iraq in March 2003 is comparable to Western desires in the 19th and early 20th centuries to partition the Ottoman Empire. It was perceived back then that the West was not going to be satisfied only with dividing the Empire; it was believed that the ultimate aim was to remove all traces of Turkish existence from Anatolia. It is in this

context that the war in Iraq awakened memories of the First World War, and was perceived by Turkey as a direct threat to its existence.

It is possible to provide many examples of this mindset, which I refer to as an ‘anti-West paranoia,’ and is prevalent among Turkey’s ruling elite. The statement given by the Turkish National Security Council general secretary, army commander Tuncer Kılıç, on April 15, 2003, before the Turkish Societies in Brussels, illustrates this mindset well.

[Europe] won’t open its doors to us. Since the conquest of Istanbul, the Europeans have viewed us as their foe ... a nation like the Turks, whose ancestors pushed their way up to the doors of Vienna, will never be welcome by them...Europe brought up the Armenian Question in the 1850s. After WWI, they turned the Armenians against us and created the foundation for dozens of horrific events that followed. The PKK [Kurdistan Workers’ Party] is an organization that the EU has established. The EU is the reason 33,000 of our people were killed. The EU has secretly and openly supported terrorist organizations in Turkey. The EU is afraid that Turkey will rise up again to be a new Ottoman Empire.¹

So does a book specially prepared in 2002 by the Turkish National Ministry of Education to be distributed to all schools in Turkey as part of a campaign to educate Turkish children about the problem of ethnic minorities in the region throughout history (that is, the Armenian Genocide), and especially the policy of the West towards Turkey. The main thesis of the book is that the West has always desired to divide and conquer Turkey, as it attempted to do in the early 20th century:

The policy towards minorities and divisiveness, which Turkey’s neighbors, along with the USA and France, Germany, Italy, Russia and Sweden, among other European nations, follow, and in fact are insisting on being enforced in Turkey today, brings to mind this question: What has changed in the world or in Turkey that makes the same countries force the same issues that they did on Turkish policy one hundred years ago?

The answer follows:

These countries, which cannot tolerate a strong Turkey either in the short or long term, which seek out reasons or make up reasons to prevent this from happening ... these countries which have a monopoly on the world economies, don’t want a strong Turkey. According to these countries, Turkey is a tree whose branches will be pruned whenever they grow long but whose roots will never be cut off because a Middle East without Turkey would lack stability. The same policies were followed when the Ottoman Empire was in its decline.²

It was within this context that the Bush administration’s vocal policy in 2003 of liberating Iraq and democratizing the region in general was perceived as a threat to Turkey’s existence. It is clear that as long as the US

takes seriously its policy of democratizing Iraq and the region, it will come more and more into conflict with Turkey's authoritarian political structure. In this respect, Turkey's ability to effect a smooth political transition from authoritarianism to democracy is heavily contingent on the direction US foreign policy takes in the region.

If we regard the Bolshevik Revolution and the Ottoman Empire's defeat in the First World War as the external factors that determined the emergence of the Turkish Republic, the domestic factors were the ethno-religious conflicts in Anatolia and the ensuing wars and massacres in the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish Republic was born out of the destruction of Christian populations in Anatolia and the establishment of a homogeneous Muslim state. This subject is discussed in Chapter 4 on 'The Homogenizing and Ethnic Cleansing of Anatolia.'

The Armenian Genocide was the epitome of the policy of destruction and was declared a taboo subject immediately after the creation of the Republic. One important reason for this declaration was the connection between the Genocide and the foundation of the Republic. The Republic was founded to a significant degree by the members of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which was responsible for the implementation of the wholesale deportation of and massacres against the Armenian population of Anatolia. The authority of the Ottoman civil-military elite continued, uninterrupted, into the period marking the establishment of the Turkish Republic. This elite perceived the Christian population of Anatolia, and especially the Armenians, as internal foes working for foreign imperialist interests and the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. It is therefore no surprise that in Turkey every reference to an open debate on the Republic's early history is suppressed and perceived as a continuation of a historical legacy of subversion. Individuals who call for an open debate are stigmatized as treasonous and enemies of the nation. In Chapter 7 on 'The Causes and Effects of Making Turkish History Taboo,' and Chapter 8 on 'The Genocide and Turkey,' I discuss the reasons for this policy of suppression of historical truth and its negative consequences for Turkey.

In Chapter 5 I provide some documentation on the Genocide itself. The tabooing of the Armenian Genocide not only impedes the process of democratization for Turkey, but also obstructs scholarly inquiry and debate. Scholarly activity has been locked into a cycle of verification or denial of what happened in history, as opposed to analyzing the socio-political and historical factors that allowed that history to unfold. We are lagging in the task of addressing the real question of why the Armenian Genocide occurred. There existed in 1915 a confluence of general factors—social, political, historical, and cultural—that combined in such a way as to make the implementation of genocide possible. These general

factors must be viewed in conjunction with the specific factors, both political and psychological, that made the implementation of genocide seem desirable to those in power in 1915. In Chapters 2 and 3 I discuss aspects of Turkish national identity and the Armenian Genocide, and explore the general background factors to the Genocide, showing that it was not an aberration within the flow of Ottoman-Turkish history. The Armenian Genocide can best be understood within the framework of the transition period from Empire to Republic. I have argued that the emergence of Turkish nationalism in the years of the Empire's decline played an important role. One logical outcome of my approach is the recognition of a clear interconnection between the democratization of Turkey today and the need to address the Armenian Genocide. If Turkey is to develop from an authoritarian, bureaucratic state into a standard Western democracy, it must come to terms with history and take a critical approach towards the problems surrounding its national identity. For this to occur, Turkish society must take an active role in opening a debate on the Armenian Genocide as discussed in Chapter 9. The dominance of the denial syndrome must be overcome, and direct interaction between Turkish and Armenian societies must take place.

As I have described in Chapter 6 on the treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne, the history and issues surrounding the Armenian Genocide were dropped from the international agenda by the early 1920s. Securing their material interests was more important to the West than establishing human rights, or addressing the issue of crimes against humanity, which had been the rhetoric during the early stages of the First World War. Today, as we watch the US and Britain intervene in the Middle East, again under the banner of the 'liberation of oppressed people' in the region, we are grappling with the same problem as in the past.

Democracy in the Middle East has its challenges, owing to the mutual suspicions of the various ethnic groups in the region, which arose during the conflicts and massacres that occurred as part of the transition from Empire to nation-states. Each ethnic group today views the others from the perspective of that period. Without addressing the past problems between different groups, establishment of a secure and stable future would be very difficult in the region. The debate that took place on many sides in the region on the sending of Turkish troops into Iraq as a peacekeeping force is only one example of this reality. This issue too shows very clearly that any effort towards democratization in the region today must begin with a dialogue about history and, most important, the ensemble of events that transpired during the transition from Empire to Republic. Only such a process will complete Turkey's real transition from Empire to a normal Republic.

Chapter 1 will attempt to outline some of the obstacles facing contemporary Turkey in its efforts at transition from Empire to Republic. These include certain aspects of the imperial legacy of the Ottoman Empire, and particularly the pivotal role of some of the top leaders of the Young Turk Ittihadist regime in the forging of the Republic, and the determination of the chief architects of the Republic to dissociate themselves from that regime, which was doomed to remain identified with the Armenian Genocide. The basic problem was and remains today the continuation of the ruling elite from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic. This continuity is one of the biggest impediments to democratization.

NOTES

1. *Radikal*, April 26, 2003.
2. Yavuz Ercan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bazı Sorunlar Ve Günümüze Yansımaları* (Some Issues from the Ottoman Empire and Their Reflection in the Present), National Ministry of Education, Directorship of Educational Policy, Ankara, 2002, pp. 71–72.

1

What Are Turkey's Fundamental Problems? A Model for Understanding Turkey Today

For any Western society today, it is possible to give an answer to the question 'What are this country's fundamental problems' by focusing on several basic points. But if we were to pose a similar question in regard to Turkey, we would not know when to stop counting. Yet for all of Turkey's current problems, it is possible to speak of a main body of problems which we can describe as common to all.

Regarding Turkey, and especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, we have struggled with the following fundamental problem, which has gained currency among sociologists: 'What is it that keeps a society together and/or leads to its collapse and dissolution?' Émile Durkheim's concept of 'anomie' would appear to have again gained importance. What Durkheim was trying to explain by this term was the condition wherein the relationship between the behavior of individuals (and groups) and social ties is severed. When the ties between the individual and society are severed it creates a situation wherein the society's very continuation is put into question. But the problematic aspect of the concept of anomie is that it presupposes the existence within societies of a normal condition, from which anomie represents a deviation. With regard to Turkey, however, our problem is our inability to define any single period, from the founding of the Republic until now, as a normal condition. Approaching past events in Turkey as a deviation from some sort of normal condition, which we would be able to accept as an ideal, is not a method that will aid us in understanding Turkey and its problems.

The roots of the problems with which Turkey grapples today stretch back to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in the early 1920s. We can, without hesitation, formulate the problem thus: the roots of Turkey's current problems derive from its Ottoman inheritance. Such a formulation stresses the search for an answer to the question of what exactly that inheritance was, and this in turn opens the door to the debate on questions

of continuity and discontinuity in the transition from Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic. This question has not only been confined to academic debate in Turkey, but has also been the subject of heated polemics. Nevertheless, it is a question outside my field of interest here. I know that the questions which I will take up here can be explained within the framework of a 'continuity of mentality' which survived the empire-to-republic transition, and which fundamentally explains the behavioral worlds of both ruler and ruled in the Turkish Republic. But I would like to limit myself here to the period directly after the establishment of the Republic.

From the ancient Greece of Aristotle and Plato until today, there is a venerable tradition of considering the factors which hold political collectives together and those which pave the way for their breakup. It claims that...for political collectives to be able to possess stability, there must be a clear agreement between the institutions which have an objective existence, and the subjective behavior of individuals toward these institutions.¹

This means that the precondition for a stable political structure is an agreement between the institutions in society and the norms that form their basis, and between the norms and value judgments that order individuals' relationships with one another. This relationship can, in very general terms, be defined as 'political culture.' If the value judgments, norms, conscious and unconscious mental worlds and psychological makeup that determine the relationships between individuals and different groups in a society are not in harmony with its institutional world or its political culture, then there exists a serious systemic problem. This is the situation in Turkey.

The Fundamental Problem: the Failure to Decide on a System

We can formulate Turkey's most basic problem in the following way. Turkish society has yet to answer the question of whether or not it lives or wishes to live within the same political borders. And if different segments of Turkish society do wish to live together as individuals and groups, they have not yet been able to achieve an understanding among themselves as to what foundations, what conditions to impose upon this political entity called the Turkish Republic. The questions of what shared sense of belonging should bind them together within the borders of the Republic, and on what consensus it should rest, remain unanswered. An overarching identity, one that would assist in conceptualizing their reasons for living together and tie both individuals and groups to one another, remains as yet unformed.

If this assertion appears too harsh, let me stress this point: the various collectives that live within Turkey appear to be still far from making a fundamental decision on whether or not it is actually necessary to live together, as a society, within the current political borders. In other words they, both as individuals and as groups, have not yet truly decided to live together. While there may indeed be certain signs that might hint at a decision having been taken in practice, they have not yet been identified as a social consensus, a 'social contract.' The people of Turkey have not formulated the necessary conditions for living together as one common society. In other words, they are at present casting about for these conditions. This can be observed in the daily political debates occurring in Turkey today. Almost every problem is characterized as being fundamental to the political system, and is thus debated as a problem concerned with the very foundations of that system. A good many features that in Western societies are accepted without question are still hotly debated in Turkey. When viewed from the outside, the picture that emerges is this: the Republic and the framework of a democratic state based on laws that are believed to hold the society together or at least appear to have been accepted by all of the country's political forces do not actually carry any meaning beyond being a platform that allows the political forces to carry on their struggles. Concepts like the democratic state based on laws and the Republic have not been internalized, either by society or by its political representatives.

In their current form, the Republic and the democratic state of laws are today nothing but a façade, to be used by the various political currents while searching for an alternative socio-political system as a means to further their own ends. These institutions, which must form the basis of coexistence for the entire society, do not currently provide a sound foundation, and instead are merely used by the various political forces, all of which regard one other as enemies to be excluded or eliminated. It is as if these groups and collectives, whether they describe themselves as political, ethno-cultural or religious, are all struggling for a different system, one outside of the existing democratic state based on laws.

For these groups, it is as if the Republic is equated with a transitional stage to be endured for the present. Tayyip Erdoğan succinctly summed up this sentiment when he was the mayor of Istanbul: 'Democracy is like a streetcar that will carry us to the final destination. When we get there, we'll get off.' Erdoğan, since February 2003 chairman of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP), and since March 2003 President of Turkey, made this statement in the mid-1990s, when he was still a member of the Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, or RP).²

That the current political system is only a transitional device to be used for developing a new system is a belief found in all political currents and

groups within Turkey. Viewed from the outside, it appears as if there is not a serious political group, except for the armed forces, that sincerely desires the continuation of the Republic. The armed forces act as the true owners of present-day Turkey. From the point of view of the large collective forces within society, today's Republic, and the democratic state based on laws by whose power it exists, are outside of society, existing somewhere else, like a strange, unfamiliar garment. There is a poor fit, an incompatibility between the state, with its existing structures, and society, with its social groups. What we are talking about here is alienation between the state and society. The relationship between state and society is in the manner of relations not between 'us,' but between 'us' and the 'other.' And perhaps the armed forces also act as they do because they are profoundly conscious that no one other than themselves has claimed ownership of the Republic in the true sense of the phrase.

It appears as if there is such a paradox at work. The moment the armed forces would withdraw their protective hand from the state the various groups in Turkey would strangle themselves as a society. All the groups would do everything in their power to eliminate the 'others,' whom they see as opposed to them, and to whom they have assigned no place in the new system they hope to establish. Whether we speak of the Turkish ultra-nationalists, or the Kurds, or the radical secularists who view the headscarf as a symbol of reaction, or the Islamists who seek to establish a social and political order on the basis of Islamic values, none would be able to tolerate the others' existence in the idealized societies that they hope to establish. Thus, the current situation in Turkey is comparable to that of Germany in the Weimar Republic of the 1920s. In that period, all of the then-current political movements aspired not to protect existing democratic institutions, but rather to use these institutions to destroy the system and to establish their own in its place. The ultimate success of the Nazis derived in large part from the general lack of interest displayed by other parts of society for democratic institutions. The gap between the mentality that prevailed in German society and the attitude of indifference toward democratic institutions brought the system to a collapse. In such a situation, the indifference of the German army, in particular with regard to the choice of either a democratic or an authoritarian regime, helped accelerate this process of collapse. A similar situation, I would assert, exists today in Turkey. Between the veneer of the Republic and a democratic, law-based state on one side, and the political currents' imaginings of an ideal future on the other, there exists a tear in the social fabric which has yet to be mended, a broad gap that remains unbridged. The fact that the system continues to function despite this mental divide is largely due to the armed forces' insistence that it do so.

It goes without saying that the existing institutions in Turkish society present an image that cannot easily be described as democratic. The existence on one hand of the basic principles of a law-based state, and, on the other, of seriously anti-democratic institutions, allows broad sections of society to perceive the system as one of repression. This perception is very keen among the Islamists, Alevi and Kurds, in particular, as well as among other groups who see themselves as bound by common linguistic, ethnic or religious characteristics and who feel that no measures have been taken in order to defend or preserve these characteristics. Not infrequently, these groups or their individual members have experienced oppression on account of these characteristics.

Furthermore, there is another, more important dimension than this. As the inheritors of the *Herrschaftsmentalität*, or 'ruling mentality' of the Ottomans, the current ruling elite possesses no such tradition of adapting itself to legal regulations, or of basing its governance on law. One reason for the widespread mistrust that exists in Turkey toward the legitimizing principles of the democratic law-based state is the fact that the ruling class itself does not comply with them. In other words, the rulers themselves lack the mindset to administer the country according to the obligations of the existing legal system. This can be illustrated with two examples: the Susurluk scandal and the prohibition on torture.

The Susurluk scandal was exposed by a car accident in that city in 1997. A mafia leader, a police chief, and a parliamentary deputy were all found dead together in the same car. It was thus revealed that the criminal element, the police and politicians had been working together for some time in the organization and running of death squads, heroin trafficking, extortion and murder. The death squads had been secretly formed to eliminate supporters of the Kurdish separatist organization, the PKK. This cooperation of criminals, the police, politicians and also the military expanded, with the aim of personal enrichment, into heroin trafficking and even the murder of Turkish businessmen who had no political involvement, simply in order to control their businesses, mostly hotels and casinos (useful for laundering drug money). When a commission of inquiry was established by parliament to investigate this situation, members of the military refused to testify. Even though the activities under investigation are completely illegal, the legal system has no power to proceed against the military. While the other elements in this criminal conspiracy did appear before the commission, there were no serious consequences for them.

Torture and the mistreatment of detainees have been outlawed in the legal system since 1854, and punishment is indicated for those committing such acts. Yet, we know that such sanctions are not carried out systematically. On the contrary, in open opposition to existing laws, those who carry

out such deeds are generally rewarded. In other words, the ruling class considers it natural and normal not to comply with the rules that legitimize their own positions, and for whose proper operation they are responsible. The most important characteristic of the mindset of Turkey's ruling elite is its transformation of arbitrariness into accepted practice, if not a set of formal rules. This is the primary cause of Turkey's 'societal schizophrenia.'

Hypocritical Behavior: Societal Schizophrenia

What is meant here by societal schizophrenia is the enormous gap between the current *modus operandi* of the state structure in Turkey on one hand, and Turkish social reality on the other. Detachment between the state and the individual or collective groups is our present reality. A consequence of this detachment, over many years a strange mode of behavior has ordered the relations between the various individuals and groups, as well as those between these groups and the state. On one side there exists an order we might refer to as 'the everyday world of real life,' and on the other side there is the 'official world,' which is outside of the everyday world and in serious conflict with it.

On one hand, the legal system, with all its claims to order relations between individuals and between the state and its citizens, is fundamentally responsible for society's functioning. But on the other hand, neither the state itself nor citizens order their behavior according to the legal system, its values and institutions. There are, however, other value systems and models of behavior which everyone uses to order their relations. All of the internal social forces, including those that administer the state, are conscious of the fact that their own value systems are in conflict with those of the legal system, and that they are either secretly or openly different from it.

We may describe this as a product of the ruling tradition that harks back to the Ottomans. The inefficiency of the theocratic laws of the Ottoman state, which did not provide for all aspects of social life, created a situation whereby the ruling elite was required to exercise its discretion in the exercise of justice. This application of discretion led to abuses, and discretion became arbitrariness. Max Weber described the extraordinary insecurity in law as a basic characteristic of patrimonial Ottoman society.³ In consequence of this Ottoman legacy, similarly a schizophrenic attitude of accepting the dichotomies between official state requirements and actual social norms developed among individuals and collectives within society. Over centuries, a culture of not speaking one's true opinion took root, particularly among the ruled classes. Individuals even have their official views and their private views with which to explain ideas. They express