

THE IMPACT OF RESISTANCE ON THE STATE-BUILDING PROCESS IN TURKEY

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During the early republican period Turkish nationalism, Islam, ethnicity, and regionalism all served as competing sources for the formation of new identities which in turn influenced the nature and the form of the new state. Ideological and cultural factors and internal struggles, especially non-class movements such as national, religious and ethnic struggles, shaped the policies developed by the state. This study aims to analyse the link between various movements of resistance such as social banditry, military desertion, ethnic and religiously inspired uprisings, and non-Muslim and non-Turkish opposition and the formation of the new Turkish state.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the Turkish state-building process (1919-1927) various forms of resistance movements were experienced which were based on religious, ethnic, and regional claims. This study aims to explore the impact and consequences of these various forms of resistance for the building of the modern Turkish nation-state.

I argue that Turkish nationalism developed as a response both to foreign invasion and to the development of non-Muslim nationalisms. Non-Turkish resistance to the builders of the new state, too, significantly influenced the form of the state and its policies. In response to the opposition movements led by religious, cultural, and ethnic groups, the Turkish state which was established in 1923 became more authoritarian and it denied the existence of separate cultures. Moreover, populism (which aims at creating a society free of economic class divisions), together with nationalism and secularism, became the major legitimizing ideology of the new regime in establishing its authority.

The following section separately examines the link between each form of resistance and the new Turkish state. The concluding section considers the consequences of the approach developed in this essay for theorizing the Turkish case.

II. FORMS OF RESISTANCE AND THE TURKISH STATE

It is necessary to distinguish between 'state-building' and 'state activities' since there were different kinds of resistance movements against state-building

on the one hand, and against state activities on the other. State-formation may take different forms in different locations, and this applies to state activities as well. In this context, I look at the consequences of growing nationalism and ethnic consciousness, World War I and the Turkish Independence War, Treaty of Sèvres, non-Muslim claims for independence, social banditry and internal rebellions, establishment of the Courts of Independence, the Kurdish nationalist movement, and lastly the reforms that followed it. Among these the Turkish War of Independence had revolutionary consequences. The rest were transformative developments, some with immediate visible consequences and others with more hidden agendas. Nevertheless all produced some form of resistance which had a further impact on the process of state-building, in terms of shaping the new state and its policies.

Below I discuss the link between the state and these various forms of resistance under separate headings focusing on the ways through which the state became more and more structured following the model of West European nation-states.

II.1 Nationalism

Westernization had an impact on the Turkish Revolution but the Turkish nation-state was not a natural outcome of the modernizing reforms of the Ottoman state. Moreover, it is difficult to conceive of the Turkish Revolution as an anti-imperialist movement since Turkey was never colonized and an anti-imperialist sentiment did not exist among the population.

Some aspects of Turkish nationalism should be highlighted in order to better locate various movements of resistance by non-Muslim and Muslim minority groups. The impact of Turkey's ethnically diverse cultural and historical background on the formation of the Turkish nation-state is particularly significant in understanding the internal pressures which played a role in the development of Turkish nationalism.

Republican Turkish nationalism was not able to bridge the gap between the traditional Ottoman cleavages. For Westernization and secularization continued to be important sources of tension which created new conflicts. In this respect Turkish nationalism was unique in comparison with other forms of nationalism. Its uniqueness existed of two features. First, it is distinct from classical (Western) forms of nationalism due to the tension between the 'West' and the 'traditional' ways of life. Second, it is distinct from other non-European Islamic nationalisms through the rejection of Islam as the universal basis of legitimation.

Ethnic and national identities among the former Ottoman peoples are fundamental to an understanding of Ottoman nationalism. For the nationality problem in the Ottoman state is a special form of nationalism which is different both from the Western European and the recent Asian and African nationalisms (Karpat 1973:3; Haddad 1977). Turkish nationalism was only one of the nationalisms which emerged out of the Ottoman Empire. The others were Greek, Serbian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Albanian, Armenian, Kurdish, and Arab nationalisms.

At this point it is necessary to discuss how Westernization and modernization merged with Turkish nationalism and how non-Muslim opposition contributed to the growth of Turkish nationalism. The Ottoman Empire did not have a 'central value system' due to its segmented structure. As Keyder's notes, "the Ottomans lived in a multicultural empire. The ruling Turks had never attempted to impose a cultural homogeneity on the ruled 'millets'. Besides, this ruling ethnic group had made no attempt to remain pure, and interethnic marriage had been a constant in the practice of the upper classes" (1993:19). Ottoman segmentation was religious, linguistic, and ethnic. When the Balkans started their revolutionary movements, Ottoman reformers attempted to unite all these segmented groups under the umbrella of 'Ottomanism'. Ottomanism was granting a common Ottoman citizenship to all the persons belonging to various different religious groups (Mardin 1977: 284). However, this policy failed to bring ethnic uniformity to the Ottoman society as a consequence of the growth of nationalist movements in Europe affecting the Christian peoples of the Empire most.

The Young Turk movement was a response to the failure of Ottomanism and the Young Turk government which was formed in 1908 was more dedicated to the principle of unifying the Ottoman Empire by strengthening the centre. In this respect it was not Turkism but Ottomanism which was their programme. However, as a result of the growing cleavages between various nationalities of the Empire, Ottomanism gave way to Turkism.

The Young Turks were the first to try to bring about cultural and educational unification as a solution to the Empire's problems. As Berkes notes, "the interests of the three major elements in the Ottoman Empire – the Turks, non-Turkish Muslims, and non-Muslims – did not altogether coincide. It was inevitable to recognize the national aspirations of the non-Turks and non-Muslims. Hence, there was only one thing left for the Turks: to recognize their own national aspirations, to forget about being Ottomans, and to be content with being Turks" (1964:322). Turkism became much more influential among the Turks compared to pan-Islamism but the development of 'Turkish national identity', and of a 'Turkish nation' as distinct from the Ottoman state was a very slow process.

The most important source for the ideas of Turkism was the new European science of Turcology. From the eighteenth century onwards a series of Orientalists had studied the history and languages of the eastern and pre-Islamic Turks. These works made available the history and the role played by the Turks before they entered Islam. When this new knowledge reached the Turks themselves, it greatly affected their sense of identity and their relations with other groups. This new Turkish identity slowly merged with spreading European nationalism (Lewis 1968:345). Although these works did not become influential in the short run (Berkes 1964:313-314), in the long run, they contributed to the creation of what Smith calls 'ethnic myths' which gives rise to an overriding commitment and bond for the community (1984:95).

Another important source for the development of Turkish nationalism came from the Russian Turks. Among these were Muslim Tatars and the Turks from

the Volga, Central Asia, Azerbaijan, and Crimea who were coming to live in the Ottoman Empire towards the end of nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century. The well-educated exiles from Russia, affected by the revolutionary tendencies of the Russian Empire, played a major role in the spread of Turkish nationalism as a political ideal (Lewis 1968:348). Keyder notes that in addition to Turkic groups in the Russian empire, Turkic groups in the Austro-Hungarian empire also played a role in the growth of Turkish nationalism (1993:21).

First ideas of Turkism were developed in the literary and educational fields. Linguistic developments also contributed to the growth of Turkism. Many Turkish writers worked on bringing the colloquial and purer words back into literature (Adivar 1930:120). The Ottoman language was a mixture of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian languages. With the linguistic developments that took place since the Abdülhamit era, the Ottoman language eventually became disintegrated and gave rise to a Turkish language as the language of the Turkish nation.

In the early thirties the institutions of the 'Turkish Language Society' and the 'Turkish Historical Society' were established. These institutions undertook research to support the new regime's vision of Turkish nationalism. The Turkish History Thesis, which assumed a historical link between the Central Asian Turks and the ancient Anatolian civilizations, was a result of such research (Öztürkmen 1994:159).

During the Young Turk rule various Turkish Clubs were established throughout the country. The first was 'Türk Derneği' (Turkish Society). Founded in 1908 Turkish Society dedicated itself to the study of Turkish people – their languages, history, literatures, and civilizations. Another organization, known as the 'Turkish Hearth' (Türk Ocağı), was founded in 1912. These clubs were effective in spreading Turkish nationalism. Although they were cultural organizations they did help Turkism to gain a political outlook rather than a cultural one. Nevertheless Turkish nationalism remained ineffective as a political principle. Non-Muslim opposition became a turning point for the transformation from cultural to political Turkish nationalism.

II.2 Armenians and Greeks of Turkish Origin (Rums)

It was under these conditions that the struggle between the Ottoman and the Christian minorities gained a new impetus. During the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), the nationalist claims made by non-Muslims caused a series of bitter struggles between the Kemalists and non-Muslim ethnic groups and many oppressive measures were taken against the Christians.

Nationalistic claims made by Armenians and the Greeks of Anatolia (Rums in Turkish) was the most influential in the development of Turkish nationalism. As a consequence of these territorial and political claims, Turkish nationalists aimed at saving Muslims from their Christian rivals. Non-Turkish Muslim population, too, played an influential role in shaping the future of Turkish nationalism which I discuss below. The Treaty of Sèvres, which was an approval for the nationalistic claims made by the Armenians and Greeks, forced the Turks to de-

velop a form of political nationalism which replaced the cultural nationalism of the Young Turk era. The idea of forming a secular nation-state was based on this shift in the form of nationalism.

II.3 The Idea of Nation-State

Ottomans made use of both pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism during the Young Turk rule and both trends proved to be ineffective sources in protecting the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire. As Lewis argues, Islam and Turkism were both non-territorial and had no ties either with a country or with a government. Accordingly, "the Muslim Turks of Turkey might classify themselves as Muslims – by faith and law; or as Turks – by language and real or imagined descent; they had not yet thought of defining themselves as the people of a country – of Turkey" (1968:352).

During the Young Turk rule the divisions between the Westernists, Islamists, and Turkists became more clear and rigid. Westernist school of thought, which merged with Turkish nationalism, became the most influential trend in shaping the future Turkish state. Forming a modern nation-state, based on the Western model, was adopted by the Kemalists in the aftermath of the Turkish Independence War. The first conception of a territorial Turkish state was introduced with the National Pact of 1919-1920. In addition, the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres between the Ottomans and the Allied forces became a major factor in adopting the Western model of a territorial state from the West. This issue will be evaluated further in the following pages.

The idea of 'Turkey' was a very recent development. Adivar writes that "the term Turkey, although used by western people in connection with the Ottoman Empire, was never used by the Ottomans themselves. It was used after 1908 at times, but never as much as the term Ottoman Empire" (1930:158). Generally, the term Turk was a label used in the Empire to refer to the Anatolian peasantry (Keyder 1993:21).

Although identity and loyalty based on the Turkish nation was introduced by the Young Turks, it was with the Kemalist republic that the idea of 'Turkey' as the land of the Turks came into existence (Lewis 1968:353). The name of the country became 'Turkey' (Türkiye) in the Law of 1921, and in the Republican constitution of 1924.

Kemalism tried to combine the Ottoman statist ideal by modernizing it with the liberal, federalist Anglo-Saxon models. Atatürk's ideology can be characterized as the denial of the past, as a search for a new national identity, and as an attraction to the West. Kemalism denied the expansionist tendencies of Islamism and Turkism. Within this framework it initiated resistance and opposition from among those groups defending their Muslim identity.

II.4 Social Banditry and Internal Revolts

Social banditry, inherited from the Ottoman Empire, was a major challenge to the establishment of the central authority (Aybars 1988:218; Adivar 1928:61). Kemalists, on the other hand, relied heavily on bandit bands during the early pe-

riod of the Turkish state-building process managing to integrate many bandit leaders into the National Forces which was formed to fight against the occupiers (Bozdemir 1982:85).

In its traditional form social banditry was motivated mainly by economic reasons (Steinhaus 1974:96). However, during the establishment of the new state it became a form of resistance to state-building for political reasons (Toynbee 1923:278-279). For example, some bands allied with the Kurds and with the Circassians, supporting their movement against the Ankara government. Yet there were a considerable number of bandit bands that supported the new government and helped the central powers in suppressing ethnic and religious movements that were undermining the authority of the Kemalists (Ergil 1974:86; Hiçyılmaz 1993:181,183; Birinci 1971:56). Traditional social banditry also continued to exist alongside these other forms of banditry. As Ulucay notes, the main cause for the prevalence of this form of banditry was the weakening of state authority (1944:140).

In general social banditry served both as an 'individual' and as a 'collective/organized' form of resistance to state authority and regional factors played only a minor role in differentiating one form of banditry from another (Bayrak 1985:66; Selek 1963:100). Military desertion, too, has been a serious problem for the central authorities since the Ottoman times. Prolonged wars has been one reason for massive withdrawal from the army (Avcıoğlu 1986:913-914). Another reason for deserting from the army was the lack of central organization capable of providing order in Anatolia (Aybars 1988:7). Military desertion became part of social banditry (Atay 1958:111-112; Yalman 1930:263-264) and merged with it both as an 'individual' and as a 'collective' form of resistance.

As Hobsbawm suggests, when social banditry merges into a larger movement, it becomes part of a force which can change the society (1969:23). In the Turkish case, many bandit bands supported the Kemalists and they operated much better than the Nationalist Army both in suppressing internal revolts and in resisting Greek invasion. It was with their support that the Kemalists were able to win the National Liberation War.

As a consequence of social banditry, public safety became a major problem in Turkey which undermined the authority of the new Ankara government. The passing of the 'Law on High Treason' in April 1920, and the establishment of the 'Courts of Independence' were the measures initially taken against military desertion and social banditry since the authorities had no control over their activities. The Ankara government began its brigand hunting based on this law and executed many brigands and military deserters, either because they were practising banditry or because they took part in local revolts against the Nationalists. In addition, the Courts of Independence became effective in providing the needed manpower for military service, and facilitated the establishment of the regular army which further contributed to the centralization of state power. It was through the establishment of the regular army that the Turks were able to draw back the Greeks from Anatolia. Through this military success the new state gained legitimacy not only among the Western countries but also among

the Turkish population. In this respect, the establishment of these extraordinary tribunals was a turning point in the history of early Turkish political life.

II.5 Reforms and Popular Resistance

Non-Turkish Muslim resistance had far more important consequences for the building of the Turkish nation-state than the resistance of the local Turkish population. Particularly the Kurds, Circassians, and, to a lesser extent, Georgians took part in these movements of resistance against the Ankara government. Many revolts took place during the Turkish Independence War and in its aftermath which were led by royalists and Islamic sheiks, and in some cases were supported by the British and other Allied forces (Smith, E. 1959: 43). These rebellions were carried out by those groups supporting the Sultan-Caliph. Non-Turkish resistance contributed to the growth of Turkish nationalism and to the idea of forming a nation-state as the sole alternative to secure the Turkish population, which constituted the majority of the remaining Ottoman population. I deal with the Kurdish resistance under a separate heading.

Generally, it can be argued that, non-Turkish opposition was perceived as a more serious threat to Turkish unity since it further destroyed the 'Muslim identity' in Anatolia that remained after the development of separatist Albanian and Arab nationalisms. These movements were ethnic in origin, and their claims contributed to moving towards building a nation-state. When Atatürk replaced the official religion with the principle of 'laicism', the basis of legitimation offered by Islam was destroyed. By the time the nation-state was established, the resistance between the centre and the provinces had turned into a power struggle for the control of the state. This struggle was mainly between the periphery, unified under the domain of religion, and the state espousing modernity, nationalism and centralization (Baykan 1990:143).

Under Ottoman and Turkish governments, territorial frontiers had always existed. Each tribe inhabited a well-defined territory and had rights in well-defined pasturelands (van Bruinessen 1983:373). After the Independence War territorial frontiers were more strictly defined, not only on a tribal basis but also on a national basis. Cultural frontiers, which are erected by tribes when threatened by the state or other outsiders (Tapper 1983: 71), had also existed since the Ottoman times. Cultural frontiers, too, became more clearly defined in maintaining the 'ideology of independence' after the establishment of the Turkish state, especially for religious groups and Kurds. For example, Olson notes that, Kurdish leaders began to make propaganda against the Kemalists among the sheikhs and 'hocas' (religious teachers) in 1920. They began to wear Kurdish clothes, to speak Kurdish, and to circulate Kurdish poems among the tribes (Olson 1989:27). After the hat reform those resisting the new hat law began to wear the old headgear known as 'türban' in place of the prohibited 'fez'. In this respect, these resistance acts first against the Nationalists and later against the reforms carried out by the state can be seen as taking place mainly within territorial and cultural frontiers.

Social and spatial frontiers (Tapper 1983: 71) also constituted areas of struggle. Using middlemen and chiefs as negotiators has always been an effective means of solving the tensions between tribe and state. Spatial frontiers, too, had existed under Ottoman rule. Kemalists succeeded in drawing some Kurds to their side by offering them official positions such as governor (*kaymakam*) or mayor. They also offered jobs to influential Kurds to join the nationalist movement (Olson 1989:29).

Turkish nationalism did not allow spaces for the development of a variety of other political identifications. Ethnic and religious identities were rejected and were not represented at the level of national politics. The adoption of Westernism, nationalism, secularism and populism as the basic principles to be followed, in a sense, prevented the unification of the centre and the periphery. Those movements of resistance against Kemalist reforms can be examined within the context of Westernization. It can be argued that Kemalism fostered further segmentation in Turkish society as a result of the process of Westernization of traditional values. As Mardin notes, while the lower classes supported the War of Independence and resisted the invaders, the civil aims of the revolutionaries were not supported by popular demands (1971:198,199).

II.6 Kurdish Nationalism

The development of Kurdish nationalism played a decisive role in structuring the form of the Turkish state. Kurdish resistance movements and revolts that took place during the Turkish War of Independence constitute the first phase of Kurdish opposition. The second phase, beginning with the Sheikh Sait Revolt (1925), was based on nationalistic claims rather than the ethnic ones compared to the earlier Kurdish movements.

The abolition of the caliphate was the turning point in the emergence of these nationalist-inspired Kurdish revolts. During the Sheikh Sait Revolt, the Law for the Maintenance of Public Order (*Takrir-i Sukun*) was passed by the Assembly. This law enabled the government to suppress any kind of opposition against the new state policies. The Courts of Independence were also re-established. Although the Sheikh Sait Revolt was a local nationalist revolt motivated by religious beliefs (Tuncay 1992:129-130), it forced the government to develop more strict policies to reform and standardize Islam and thus more firmly establish its authority. Following the suppression of the revolt all fanatical dervish (mystic) orders (*tarikas*) were attacked and outlawed. The reforms which followed the Sheikh Sait Revolt were intended to complete the process of secularization.

Despite the general conflict between the state and the tribes, not all tribes experience conflict with the state authority. The Kurdish population never acted in a unified way in their relation to the central authority (Mumcu 1991:75-76; Yalçın-Heckmann 1991:117). One should note that the strict division among Sunni and Alevi (Shiite) Muslims, which caused hostile relations between Muslim Turks, also applies to Sunni and Alevi Kurds. The Alevis of Turkey are mostly known as the Shiis. However, Alevis represent the Turkish version of Shiism

which incorporates elements of Sufism, folk culture, and Shamanism (a Shaman is an unspecialized medical, magic, and religious practitioner, often also called a medicine man or witch-doctor). The Kurds should not be considered as an unified ethnic group since they are composed of a set of ethnic groups such as Sunni, Alevi, Yezidi. Among the Kurds, "no estimates are available, but on the basis of the popular estimate that 70% of all Kurds in Turkey are Sunnis, most of the remaining 30% should be Alevis, after the exclusion of the Yezidis (ca. 10,000?)" (Andrews 1989:116). The Kurds mostly refer to language and religion first as constituting their ethnic identity. There are various religious and linguistic groups among the Kurds. For example, Zaza speakers consider themselves, and are considered by the Kurmangi speakers, to be Kurds. Many Alevis, who speak Zaza or Kurmangi dialects, consider themselves to be Kurds as well. However, many Shafi'i Kurds refuse to consider Alevis and Yezidis (a non-Muslim sect living among the Sunni Kurds) as Kurds. There is extremely rare inter-marriage between these religious groups, much rarer than between Turkish and Kurdish Alevis or even Turkish and Kurdish Sunnis (van Bruinessen 1989: 613-614).

The abolition of the Caliphate (1924) and the secularizing policies of the new Turkish state fuelled Kurdish nationalism. In this respect, the Sheikh Sait Revolt (1925) marks the beginning of a new era of politically organized Kurdish resistance movement. Efforts to assimilate the Kurds further contributed to the growth of Kurdish nationalism. However, due to the divisions among the Kurds, Kurdish opposition – including the Sheikh Sait Revolt which was restricted to the Zaza speaking Kurdish tribes – cannot be considered as an opposition in unity.

III. CONCLUSION

Ideological and cultural resistance based on religion, ethnicity, and regionalism has been regarded as trivial or as secondary in most works on Turkish state formation. Considering the impact of resistance to state building (as distinct from formal political opposition) is crucial for understanding how resistance shapes the form of the state. The absence of or the silence about resistance in the Turkish literature has influenced the conceptualizations of the Turkish state and its formation.

The form of the new Turkish state was basically the West European one but the path of development was, however, divergent and distinct from that of the West European state. In response to the claims made by various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups to establish a culturally and linguistically homogeneous society appeared as the only viable model to be followed in overcoming the problems the Kemalists faced in the aftermath of World War I. Although this process of homogenization can be regarded as incomplete it did give rise to the establishment of a modern nation state in Turkey based on the European model.

Although Westernization and modernization did play a role in the development of Turkish nationalism, many power groups with no clear class base or an ideology were involved in the making of the new state. Turkish nationalism developed as a response both to foreign invasion and to the development of vari-

ous non-Muslim and non-Turkish resistance movements. In fact, non-Muslim opposition became a turning point for the transformation from cultural nationalism (adopted by the Young Turks) to political nationalism on which the idea of forming a 'nation-state' and of 'Turkey' were built. In response to foreign invasion and domestic disturbances the Turkish state became more rational, centralized, and authoritative. Many of the reforms that took place after the proclamation of the republic (in 1923) such as the hat and alphabet reform were a response to those movements against the central authority with the aim to create a common 'Turkish culture'. Thus although not all state actions form part of the state building process, in the Turkish case most had a strong influence on the establishment of the centralized modern nation state.

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